

## Marx on Gender and the Family

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# Marx on Gender and the Family

A Critical Study

*By*

Heather A. Brown



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## Chapter One

### Introduction

In recent years, especially since the anti-globalisation movement exemplified in the protests in Seattle in 1999, scholars and activists have begun to return to Marx's critique of capitalism. Writers such as John Cassidy, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and John Holloway, for example, have acknowledged the power of Marx's critique of capitalism and have, in a variety of ways, attempted to reevaluate his work for the current conditions of a globalised capitalism.<sup>1</sup> These and other works have become even more significant, as a seemingly long-term global recession has set in and renewed and reinvigorated the anti-neoliberal movement. Recently, protests have broken out in Paris, London, Madison, Wisconsin, and a variety of locations across the world following the 'Occupy Wall Street' protests. Perhaps even more important are the protests in the Middle East that led to the overthrow of the Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan régimes, with protests also spreading to Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. All of this points to a great deal of anger and frustration with political and economic policies in the developed and developing world alike. Neoliberalism appears to be experiencing a full-scale crisis.

The situation becomes more problematic when the position of women in globalised capitalism is discussed. The United Nations reports, for example,

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1. See Cassidy 1997, Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004 and 2009, and Holloway 2006.

that women 'perform 66 percent of the world's work, produce 50 percent of the food, but earn 10 percent of the income and own 1 percent of the property'.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the economic crisis has only made things worse for women. In 2009, women made up from sixty to eighty per cent of the export-manufacturing industry-workforce in the developing world.<sup>3</sup> According to a 2009 International Labour Organization report, 'the global economic crisis is expected to plunge a further 22 million women into unemployment, which would lead to a female unemployment rate of 7.4 percent (versus 7 percent of male unemployment)'.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, women's political power does not appear to be increasing. A 2011 study found that women's average participation in a single parliamentary house or in the lower house of a two-chamber system was just less than twenty percent.<sup>5</sup> Nordic countries fare the best at about 42.1 percent women, followed by the rest of Europe at 20.3 percent, and the Americas at 22 percent.<sup>6</sup> Recently, Egyptian women were very actively involved in the revolution to overthrow Mubarak. However, once he was ousted, women's role was not rewarded by access to high-level government positions. Instead, women make up less of the current cabinet than under Mubarak.<sup>7</sup>

All this seems to call for a reassessment of the relationship between Marxism and feminism. Certainly, the complex relationship between gender and class is one that will need to be addressed in order to improve the position of women everywhere. After attempts in the 1970s and 1980s to adapt and integrate Marx's economics and his methodology into feminist theory, feminist critics of Marx seem to have won the debate, arguing that Marx has little-to-nothing to offer in terms of feminism and the women's liberation-movement. Instead, much feminist theory in the past two decades has tended toward a poststructuralist understanding.

A number of these studies have correctly evaluated many of the limitations of socialist feminism and its attempts to synthesise Marxism and feminism. This is especially true with regard to critiques of essentialism, ethnocentrism, and earlier Marxist feminism's largely uncritical acceptance of orthodox Marxism's economic determinism, at least in terms of discussions of the 'productive sphere'. It is not clear that the debate has been completely exhausted, however. Poststructuralism and theories of difference have been unable to

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2 UNICEF 2007.

3 World Bank 2009.

4 International Labour Organization 2009.

5 International Parliamentary Union 2011.

6 International Parliamentary Union 2011.

7. Leyne 2001.

create an anti-capitalist feminism, due to their almost singular focus on the – admittedly important – areas of culture, ideology and localised resistance.<sup>8</sup>

However, a number of studies in the past fifteen years have, in a variety of ways, attempted to bring Marx back into the discussion. Grant and Klotz reopen, in their own ways, the issue of Marx's understanding of gender and human nature, particularly in the 1844 *Manuscripts*.<sup>9</sup> Carver provides an interesting attempt to place Marx as a feminist in the context of the nineteenth century, even though, as Carver argues, he may not necessarily be of much value to current feminist theorising.<sup>10</sup> Leeb discusses the extent to which gender is structured under capitalism and how even Marx was unable to get beyond the gendered dualisms in his own work.<sup>11</sup> Gimenez provides an important assessment of Marx's dialectical method and argues that it can be used productively by feminists to overcome entrenched categories like 'man' and 'woman'.<sup>12</sup> Anderson addresses an important, although often-neglected, essay from Marx's early writings on suicide involving women.<sup>13</sup> In other works, Anderson briefly discusses Marx's notebooks on precapitalist societies and gender.<sup>14</sup> Hennessy discusses how emotional needs cannot be met under late capitalism and draws on Marx, particularly his concept of species-being, to argue that 'capitalism produces unmet human needs that are embedded in values and identities and incorporated into relations of labor in and outside the marketplace'.<sup>15</sup> This resurgence of the study of Marx and gender is very important, and offers a great deal to our understanding of the relationship between gender and class: however, to my knowledge, there has been no study that has addressed all of Marx's work on gender, including his notebooks on ethnology. This study will attempt to fill this significant gap in the literature on Marx and, it is hoped, offer some more general insights into the intersectionality of gender and class.

I argue that Marx's discussion of gender extended far beyond merely including women as factory-workers. Although Marx did not write a great deal on gender and the family, and did not develop a systematic theory of gender, it was for him, nonetheless, an essential category for understanding the division of labour, production, and society in general. Moreover, there are potential

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8 See, for example, Hennessy 1993, and especially 2006 and 2008, for an insightful discussion of these issues.

9 See Grant 2005 and Klotz 2006.

10 See Carver 1998.

11 See Leeb 2007.

12 See Gimenez 2005.

13 See Anderson 1999.

14 See Anderson 2002 and 2010.

15 Hennessy 2006, p. 387.

openings within Marx's overall theory of society that may be amenable to a feminist interpretation. I will discuss those published writings that address gender and the family directly or indirectly, as well as his 1879–82 notebooks, some of them still unpublished. Through a study of the whole of this material, it becomes clear that Marx, although he never fully developed these ideas, gave important indications towards a theory of gender and society.

### **Reevaluating and developing Marx for feminist theory today**

A number of scholars have pointed to the resilience of Marxism, even after the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. For example, with regard to feminism, Gimenez has stated that '[i]f Marx's work (and the Marxist tradition, by implication) were indeed substantively afflicted by all the shortcomings that social scientists and feminists attribute to it, it would have been long forgotten. But Marx's intellectual power and vitality remain undiminished, as demonstrated in the extent to which even scholars who reject it must grapple with his work's challenge, so much so that their theories are shaped by the very process of negating it'.<sup>16</sup>

Despite Marx's seemingly gender-blind and dualistic theory, a number of feminist scholars have acknowledged the power of Marx's critique of political economy and, in some cases, attempted to incorporate it into their analysis. Of course, any study dealing with Marx and gender must acknowledge the importance of the work done by early Marxist feminists such as Margaret Benston, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, and Wally Secombe, to name but a few who were very significant in the debate over the value of housework.<sup>17</sup> While coming to different conclusions (see Chapter Three for a discussion of these scholars) all brought Marx to bear in trying to politically, economically, and socially revalue women's labour in the household. This was an important development, since most scholars viewed Marx as completely gender-blind and thus unable to deal with issues involving women outside of the workforce. However, their work illustrated that Marx's theory was malleable enough to include women's issues at least involving political economy. I argue in Chapter Three that where they failed was in integrating this discussion of wages into a holistic Marxist theory of women and society. Certainly, their goals in these essays were much more limited than this, so perhaps this is a somewhat unfair critique. However, if it is possible to create

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<sup>16</sup> Gimenez 2005, p. 12

<sup>17</sup> See Benston 1969, Dalla Costa 1971, Federici 1975, and Secombe 1974.

a Marxist theory that takes into account the differential effects of gender, then more than just the theorisation of housework is necessary.

Other scholars have addressed different aspects of Marx in order to avoid the gender-blind implications of his theory. Nancy Holmstrom, for example, provides an excellent discussion of Marx's views on human nature. Here, she argues that Marx's understanding of human nature is amenable to feminism, since human nature is not a static essential entity, but rather is subject to social and technological forces and thus can change. Because of this, it possible to extrapolate beyond Marx and argue that women do not have an essential nature, but are also subject to change as society changes.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Lise Vogel attempted to provide a correction to Engels's dualistic understanding of the relationship between production and social reproduction.<sup>19</sup>

I argue, however, that these important works are somewhat problematic, since each only deals with a specific aspect of Marx's thought rather than taking into account the totality of Marx's work. As Dupré has argued, the substance of Marx's conclusions cannot be separated from his method.<sup>20</sup> The two are dialectically related. Thus, efforts to pull different aspects of Marx's method or substance out of the whole is problematic, since his relational theory gains its strength based upon its understanding of the interconnections between the whole and its parts. It is, therefore, important to look at Marx's theory as a totality – both the positive and negative aspects – in order to assess its potential in terms of advancing feminist theory and aims. This is a project that Dunayevskaya took up to some extent, and will be the major focus of this work.

With this in mind, it is necessary to make a brief methodological note. In this book, I have opted to frequently provide the reader with the exact (sometimes long) quotations from Marx rather than simply paraphrasing his arguments. While this can certainly take away from the flow and continuity of the text, I feel it is important to provide the relational context for his arguments. This is especially the case where I am dealing with some of Marx's lesser-known or unpublished writings with which many readers may not be familiar.

While many areas of feminist research have either conflated Marx and Engels, or appropriated aspects of Marx's substance or method for feminist theorising, a few currents of feminist theory have attempted to explicate Marx's views on women and relate them to his view of society and social change. Dunayevskaya is the most important example of a scholar who has

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18. Holmstrom 1984.

19. Vogel 1983. This topic will be addressed further in Chapter Three.

20. Dupré 1966.

carried out this sort of work.<sup>21</sup> One of Dunayevskaya's major contributions to the study of Marxism is found in her emphasis on looking at the totality of Marx's work and especially the importance that Marx placed on factors other than class.

Especially in *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, Dunayevskaya points to the importance in Marx's thought of 'the masses as reason'. For Marx, 'The nodal points of a serious revolutionary theory are rooted in self-activity of the masses who make the revolution, and the leadership's singling out of those live forces of revolution, not only as Force, but Reason'.<sup>22</sup> This position stands in contrast to Leninist vanguardism, on the one hand, and on the other, economic determinists who argue that social change comes almost solely from objective economic conditions. For Dunayevskaya, Marx saw that the masses themselves worked to create their own theory of change based on their experiences and their vision of what they thought that a non-exploitative society should look like. This should not be construed as voluntarism, however. Objective historical developments are just as important as subjective factors here.

Furthermore, for Dunayevskaya, this was only one form of theory. The process of constructing a theory of social change is fundamentally dialectical and moves from both practice to theory and from theory to practice.<sup>23</sup> This concept, according to Dunayevskaya, was significantly rooted in Marx's worldview and influenced his analysis of concrete historical events as well as his views on the forces of revolution, including women:

The establishment of the First International, on the one hand, and the final structuring of *Capital* on the other hand, in the 1860s revealed, at one and the same time, not only the break with the concept of theory as a debate with theoreticians, and the development of the concept of theory as a history of class struggles, but a concept also of a new revolutionary force – Black [liberation]. The culmination of all these theories and activities was, of course, the historic appearance of the Paris Commune of 1871, and there, too, we saw – along with the great discovery of a historic form for working out the economic emancipation of the proletariat – a new force of revolution, women.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, as Dunayevskaya argues, Marx learned from historical events like the abolitionist movement and the American Civil War as well as the Paris

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21. Dunayevskaya 1985 and 1991.

22. Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 172.

23. Dunayevskaya 2002, p. 5. This concept is a major theme that appears in many of her works, especially Dunayevskaya 1985, 1991, 2000, 2002 and 2003.

24. Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 161.



Commune, and incorporated these insights on new forces of revolution into his theory of society and social change.<sup>25</sup> According to Dunayevskaya, the Paris Commune was particularly important in terms of Marx's position on women as historical subjects.

Moreover, in contrast to those scholars who argued that Marx had little of importance to say about women, or that he was misogynistic, Dunayevskaya argued that women's liberation was integral to the development of socialism:

In Germany, the young Marx continued to develop a whole body of works, a theory of proletarian revolution, a whole philosophy of human liberation, deeply rooted both in class struggles *and* in that most fundamental relationship, Man/Woman. Marx helped organize women's movements, not only for better wages, but for totally different conditions of labor; not only for the right to vote, but for full freedom. Eighty full pages on women and child labor went into *Capital*, Vol. I, not only as description and resistance, but, as Marx expressed it when he drew the whole work to a conclusion, 'the new passions and new forces' that would produce the 'negation of the negation,' that is to say, become the 'grave diggers' of capitalism, creating a whole new society where 'the development of human power is its own end'.<sup>26</sup>

Here, Dunayevskaya argues that Marx not only criticised women's position in society theoretically, seeing the man/woman relationship as the most fundamental, but he also participated to some extent in organising women as well as men. Perhaps most important for Dunayevskaya, however, was that Marx's work not only highlighted women's oppression, but also showed that women were an important element of the resistance to capitalism. Men and women would have to work together on an equal basis to build new, truly human relations.

In addition to attempting to show the general continuity of Marx's thought (as opposed to more orthodox Marxists who only focus on his 'mature' writings in political economy), Dunayevskaya pointed out a number of new directions that Marx was taking, especially in his late writings that incorporated non-Western societies and women much more directly into his work. Especially important, for Dunayevskaya, were his notebooks from the 1880s, which contained significant discussion of women in precapitalist societies. She contrasted these unfinished notebooks with Engels's completed study

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25. For a detailed discussion of how these events influenced Marx's theoretical works, see Dunayevskaya 2000, Chapters Five and Six.

26. Dunayevskaya 1985, p. 81.

*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. While Engels's focus was solely on the introduction of private property as the beginning of class-conflict and the 'world-historic defeat of the female sex', Marx in his *Ethnological Notebooks* showed a much more nuanced view of these early societies. Instead of a monocausal, unilinear view of development toward class-society, Marx saw the contradictions within communal societies developing much earlier than Engels: 'Marx... showed that the elements of oppression in general, and of women in particular, arose from *within* primitive communism'.<sup>27</sup>

What was most significant, for Dunayevskaya, was Marx's emphasis on uprooting all forms of oppression, including gender-oppression. The political and economic revolution of the proletariat would not be enough. Social relations would also have to undergo significant change, and women *as women* would have to play an important role in creating a new society. Dunayevskaya therefore argued that Marx's perspectives on society and social change were not limited to class in a narrow sense. Rather, other oppressed groups and particularly women were also important to Marx.<sup>28</sup> While Dunayevskaya did advance this argument and provided convincing evidence for it, she never systematically examined the whole of Marx's writings on women to illustrate this point. This study will be an attempt to fill in at least part of that gap.

## Overview of the book

The remainder of the book provides a largely-chronological overview, analysis, and critique of Marx's writings on gender and the family, and also discusses possible openings for feminist analysis in Marx's overall theory of society. Chapter Two discusses Marx's early writings including the 1844 *Manuscripts*, *The Holy Family*, *The German Ideology*, and 'Peuchet on Suicide'. These early writings contain some of his strongest criticism of the bourgeois family and the inhumanity of capitalist society, especially for women. In addition to these criticisms, Marx begins to develop his position on the origins of women's oppression in the family and society at large. Moreover, Marx makes an important attempt to overcome the nature/culture dualism within his philosophy. Perhaps most importantly, in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, Marx appears to argue that women's oppression may be even more fundamental than that of class.

Chapter Three addresses two of Marx's most well-known works, *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*, Volume I. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and

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27 Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 180

28 Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 190

Engels provide a strong critique of the modern family, as well as predicting its eventual collapse due to objective factors in the capitalist system. In *Capital*, Marx writes in significant detail about the ways in which women and children were exploited by the capitalist system, and then continues his argument with discussion of the dissolution of the family. While Marx and Engels were certainly incorrect about the rapid dissolution of the bourgeois family, Marx's analysis deserves particular attention, since he singles out the contradictions between the universalising effects of capitalism and capital's need to exploit particularities in order to maintain a profit. Thus, while Marx was incorrect in ascribing as much weight as he did to the universalising effects of capitalism, his analysis of its contradictions and conflict remains important for feminist theory. Moreover, I argue that Marx's concepts of production and productive labour are much more complex than is usually believed.

Chapter Four addresses many of Marx's political writings on women, including articles written for the *New York Daily Tribune*, an essay from the *New York Weekly Tribune* that is not available in the *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, documents of the various labour-organisations in which he was involved, *The Civil War in France* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. These writings illustrate that Marx had some understanding of the issues that women faced under capitalism and worked to criticise and eliminate these barriers. This included his support for women joining trade-unions on an equal basis to men. Additionally, Marx's activities during and after the Paris Commune of 1871 illustrate that he began to see a greater role for women in fighting for change. The role of the women of the Paris Commune seems to have illustrated to Marx that women *as women* were also an important force for change.

Chapter Five begins the discussion of the late Marx.<sup>29</sup> It compares Marx's notes on Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* to Engels's *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which was also based on Morgan's work and to some extent, Marx's notes on Morgan. Although Marx's notes are in rough form and were never intended for publication, I argue here, following Dunayevskaya,<sup>30</sup> that these notes illustrate that Marx's views on the origin of class-society and gender-oppression are much more nuanced than those of Engels. In contrast to Engels's monocausal, unilinear model, Marx

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29. Marx's notes on Morgan and Maine have been transcribed and published by Krader 1972. However, David Norman Smith has generously provided me with his forthcoming full English translation of these notes. The Lange notes have yet to be published in any language. An English translation was generously made available to me by the editors of the MEGA project.

30. Dunayevskaya 1991.

shows how class- and gender-antagonisms began in communally-structured clan-societies before the development of private property.

Chapter Six discusses other parts of Marx's late notes on ethnology, including notes on Henry Sumner Maine's *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* and Ludwig Lange's *Römische Alterthümer* ('Ancient Rome'). In his notes on Maine, Marx was very critical of Maine's views on the family in ancient Ireland and India. Marx, who, by then, had critically appropriated Morgan's interpretation of the family, criticised Maine for his inability to see that the family had not always been the current patriarchal bourgeois family: rather, it has changed radically through history. Marx's notes on Lange, which have yet to be published in any language, provide important insight into Marx's views on the development of the patriarchal family, especially with regard to conditions in ancient Rome. Here, as in his other notes, Marx seems to suggest that the position of women varied a great deal based on a number of objective and subjective factors. Thus, for Marx, there was no 'world-historic defeat of the female sex' at the dawn of the ancient-Greco-Roman civilisation. Although women's resistance was often unsuccessful in providing significant gains, this as well as the possibility of changes in gender-relations always seems to be present for Marx. Chapter Seven provides an overview and assessment of Marx's work on gender and the possibilities for adapting it to the current situation.

## Chapter Two

### The Early Writings on Gender and the Family

Marx's work in the early to mid-1840s focused mainly on two important areas. The first of these is a general critique of bourgeois society, especially the work of political economists in Germany, France and Britain. Secondly, Marx explicated his own theory of history, society, and social change. In both of these areas, Marx carried out significant discussions of gender and the family.

This chapter will discuss four of Marx's works from the 1840s and one brief article from 1850, each of which contain significant discussions of gender and the family. Marx's major break with liberalism came in 1843–4, with what is now referred to as the 1844 *Manuscripts*. These manuscripts contain a brief but valuable discussion of gender, in which he argues that the position of women can be used as a measure of the general development of society. They also feature notable discussion of the relationship between humanity and nature, one that points toward a different understanding of the nexus between biology and society than is usually attributed to Marx. *The Holy Family*, co-authored with Engels, responds to Eugène Sue's moralistic novel *Les Mystères de Paris*. Marx defends the fictional character Fleur de Marie, a Paris prostitute, against Sue's moralism and argues that Fleur de Marie is more human than most others in bourgeois society, even though she lives in inhuman conditions. This is the case because bourgeois ideology has yet to affect her. *The German Ideology*, also co-authored with Engels, argues that the family

contains all of the significant contradictions that develop within society and that slavery is latent within the structure of the family. In a little-known text written in 1846, Marx employs the writings of the French police-official Jacques Peuchet on suicide.<sup>1</sup> Here, Marx stresses bourgeois family-morality, patriarchal power and their deleterious effects on women. Finally, in an article for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung-Politisch-Ökonomische Revue* in 1850, Marx and Engels provide a brief discussion of the nature/culture and man/woman dualisms. From this discussion, it becomes clear that Marx paid at least some attention to gender and the family in his early work and saw it as an important factor in terms of understanding society.

### **The 1844 Manuscripts**

Although unpublished during his own lifetime, the 1844 *Manuscripts* were Marx's first explication of his overall theory of society and social change. Within this important study, Marx tackles a number of critical topics such as the alienation inherent in capitalist society; the economic and political structures of capitalism; and a critique and modification of Hegel's dialectic. He also elaborates a critique of existing notions of communism. Within these manuscripts, Marx discusses gender-relations in the essay 'Private Property and Communism', which argues that the position of women is a key measure of the general development of society. Moreover, as I will argue below, Marx's dialectical understanding of the relationship between nature, culture and labour may potentially be compatible with a feminist interpretation of the relationship between nature and culture, especially as it relates to women.

#### *Di Stefano, voluntarism and transcendence*

Christine Di Stefano takes a relatively critical approach to Marx's writings as they relate to women.<sup>2</sup> According to Di Stefano, Marx's writings are 'masculinist' in at least three ways: an aggressive discursive style,<sup>3</sup> a teleological and

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1. Marx 1999

2. Di Stefano 1991b

3. While she is correct in pointing out Marx's adversarial discursive style, Di Stefano's argument in this regard is somewhat flawed. She goes too far in arguing that 'His approach to an issue was invariably one that proceeded over the toppled remains of existing, would-be, or fabricated opponents' and that 'his typical polemical mode involves "marking out his own position by eliminating former or potential colleagues from it"' (Di Stefano 1991b, p. 107). Marx was often very critical of other scholars, but his work was more than a mere negation of their work in favour of his own. Rather, Marx often critically appropriated material from some of those he criticised, most prominently Ricardo and Hegel.

dualistic ontology; and in his discussion of labour as primarily *male* labour. The latter two points are the most significant for assessing the possibility of a new amalgamation of Marxism and feminism. For Di Stefano, Marx had a closed ontological system, in which progress was inevitable and where conflict and contradiction would end with the arrival of communism:

Marx's collapsed vision of a complementary and trouble-free relation between individuals and communist society is too seamless to admit political struggle and dialogue over society's means, ends, limits, and possibilities. That the theorist par excellence of struggle and contradiction should end up with this kind of flat vision might seem incredible. But is it? Perhaps Marx himself enacts an all-too-human limit for living with perpetual conflict. The compelling diagnosis of world history as a ceaseless play of class struggle facilitates the revolutionary, if painful and violent, cure for what ails us: explosive conflict will give way to classless peace and quiet.<sup>4</sup>

For Di Stefano, this utopian viewpoint is even more problematic in terms of Marx's one-sided resolution of conflicts:

This future world is less humanistic, less universal than Marx claimed. Certainly it is a world that has moved 'beyond' the heretofore essential dialectical moment. It is a world in which 'humanity' stands over nature; in which 'the proletariat' stands in for humanity; and, finally, in which the embodied figure of the universal laborer comes to resemble the action of the commodity form under which he was previously oppressed. That is, 'he' must deny that which he requires: female reproductive labor and its connotative relations, nature and necessity.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, according to Di Stefano, Marx resolves all contradiction and conflict by privileging one side of the dualisms without actually reconciling them; instead, a new, but still hierarchically-ordered, series of dualisms remains.<sup>6</sup> While Marx claims that a socialist revolution would create the conditions for overcoming conflict between the individual and society, all that he is able to do is to create another false universal, the male proletariat.

Moreover, Di Stefano criticises Marx for what she sees as his masculinist understanding of work and his inability to incorporate women's work into his idea of productive labour. She holds that Marx dealt only with labour traditionally done by men and did not discuss work traditionally done by women.

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4. Di Stefano 1991b, pp. 117–18.

5. Di Stefano 1991b, p. 119.

6. Leeb 2007 has made a similar argument about Marx's apparent failure to overcome gendered dualisms.

Therefore, she argues that Marx had a distorted view of human labour.<sup>7</sup> What Di Stefano sees as most problematic is Marx's projection of communism, which she argues is based upon a voluntaristic view of labour and the transcendence of necessity.

For Di Stefano, Marx's ontology remains trapped within a dualistic framework that elevates humanity over nature, despite his efforts to overcome dualisms:

While dialectics purports to be antidualistic, it is already, significantly, situated within a dualistic phenomenological horizon which is to be superseded. While dialectical opposition need not operate along the virile lines of combat, it certainly takes on these contours and associations within the framework of Marx's model of class relations. Furthermore, we will also find it elaborated in his theory of labor as a 'dialectic' between man and nature, which weighs more heavily on nature than on man.<sup>8</sup>

The conflict between nature and society occurs within Marx's theory in terms of the tension between necessity and freedom, which, Di Stefano argues, Marx appears to resolve through the transcendence of necessity:

In Marx's elaboration of the modern paradox of secular responsibility, the realm of necessity takes on the burden of this responsibility. And so freedom will bear an inverse relation to the realm of necessity. The self-realization of modern man is implicated in the steady decline and eventual elimination of necessity. This inverse relationship . . . carries gendered connotations.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, according to Di Stefano, in Marx's work, as society develops, the realm of necessity diminishes in relation to the degree of freedom that humanity experiences.

Di Stefano sees this view of human development as primarily masculinist because of what she argues is Marx's transcendentalist view of nature and necessity: 'For all of its claims to emancipation and liberation, this vision of unconstrained humanity relies on a sinister mirror image to which women, nature, and necessity are bound and against which modern men must relentlessly test their capacities and limits'.<sup>10</sup> Thus, she sees the primary line of conflict in Marx's theory as lying between women/nature/necessity and men/society/freedom. This is the case because, 'An exaggerated emphasis on man's self-creative abilities also tends toward arrogance, for it denies our natural

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7. Di Stefano 1991b, p. 142.

8. Di Stefano 1991b, p. 118.

9. Di Stefano 1991b, p. 114.

10. Di Stefano 1991b, p. 127.



embeddedness and promotes resentment against a nature that has not made us godlike'.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Di Stefano argues that Marx ignores the ways in which humanity is necessarily dependent on nature, and that this overly voluntarist view exaggerates humanity's abilities and perpetuates conflict with nature and all that is seen as natural.

This is all made possible, according to Di Stefano, because of Marx's failure to take into account the importance of women's labour and its necessarily less voluntaristic nature:

An exaggerated emphasis on self-creation denies that we were born, nurtured, and originally dependent. It actively obscures the biosocial basis for species continuity and projects it exclusively into the arena of productive labor. It promotes a view of communism as severing 'the *umbilical cord* of the individual's natural connection with the species', which is experienced as an unwarranted constraint. In a related fashion, it contributes to the exaggerated, if still apt, claim that under capitalism, 'individuals are now ruled by *abstractions*, whereas earlier they depended on one another'. As if men and children no longer depended on women!<sup>12</sup>

The primary difficulty that she sees with Marx's theory is his emphasis on the transcendence of nature and necessity. I will argue below, however, that this is a somewhat limited reading of Marx's theory. As Di Stefano herself points out, Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts* contain a much different understanding of the relationship between nature and humanity:

Significantly, Marx invokes a nonpejorative vocabulary of nature and necessity [in the 1844 *Manuscripts*].... And he suggests that societies may be evaluated in terms of their success or failure in integrating nature and culture – that is, that human progress requires, among other things, a bona fide accommodation with nature. Finally, he envisions a harmonious and reciprocally constitutive coexistence of individuality and community, humanity and nature. Nowhere in this account do we find nature lurking as a merely or stupendously objectified threat or limit.<sup>13</sup>

While Di Stefano isolates the 1844 *Manuscripts* from the rest of Marx's work, I argue that this naturalistic perspective was predominant in his work throughout his life. This is the case because Marx never sought to transcend nature

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11. Di Stefano 1991b, p. 129.

12. Di Stefano 1991b, pp. 133–4.

13. Di Stefano 1991b, p. 136.

or necessity: instead, he sought *Aufhebung*,<sup>14</sup> the dialectical overcoming, or even destruction, of the old and its reemergence in a higher form.

### *Overcoming hierarchical dualisms*

Claudia Leeb provides a more nuanced argument with regard to Marx's position on the nature/culture dualism. Instead of a purely voluntaristic view, in which society is able to completely dominate nature once requisite social and technological developments have taken place, Leeb argues that Marx sought to overcome the hierarchical nature of dualisms without actually eliminating dualisms altogether.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, this involved a strong critique of the 'primacy of mind in capitalist societies'.<sup>16</sup>

Leeb holds that, while Marx was fairly successful in this endeavour in terms of removing the hierarchical relations within the theory/practice dualism, he is unable to overcome the nature/culture dualism, since it is deeply embedded within consciousness under capitalism.<sup>17</sup> Thus, while Marx was interested in overcoming the hierarchical nature of all dualisms, his writings on women illustrate some very problematic aspects with regard to working women:

These instances are especially salient in his writings on the working-class woman, who becomes linked to the 'despised body,' which stands in an absolute opposition to the 'pure mind' (linked to the middle class and men). The reinforcement of binary thought in the works of a thinker, at whose core is the overcoming of such thought, supports my argument that hierarchical oppositions concern deep, unconscious structures of capitalist societies. The signifiers 'woman' and the 'working classes' as well as racial minorities are, mostly unconsciously, linked to what constitutes the negative side of hierarchical oppositions in capitalist societies: the body, the object, and

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14. This German term has been notoriously difficult to translate into English, since there is no equivalent. Hegel defines the term as follows: 'On the one hand, we understand it to mean "clear away" or "cancel," and in that sense we say that a law or regulation is cancelled. But the word also means "to preserve", and we say in this sense that something is well taken care of. This ambiguity in linguistic usage, through which the same word has a negative and a positive meaning, cannot be regarded as an accident nor yet as a reason to reproach language as if it were a source of confusion. We ought rather to recognize here the speculative spirit of our language, which transcends the "either/or" of mere understanding' (quoted in Anderson 1995, p. 260).

15. Leeb 2007, pp. 833–4.

16. Leeb 2007, p. 833.

17. Leeb 2007, p. 834.

nature. This link contributes to uphold the force of hierarchical oppositions and often undermines attempts, such as Marx's own, to abolish hierarchical relations between binaries<sup>18</sup>

Leeb is certainly correct in pointing out that Marx sought to overcome the hierarchical nature of dualisms present in capitalist society and also that, in a number of cases, he was unable to overcome completely the prejudices of his own time, especially with regard to women. However, at a more fundamental level, she seems to downplay an essential aspect of Marx's method. For example, Leeb argues that:

Marx did not discard the notion of human nature. Rather, he was concerned that the primacy of the subject in capitalist society leads to an abstraction from nature and with that to an abstract individual. His central aim was then to abolish the hierarchical relation between the subject/nature opposition.<sup>19</sup>

Marx, however, was not only concerned with the 'primacy of the subject in capitalist society' and the way in which it leads to an 'abstraction from nature' and to an 'abstract individual'. Rather, Marx was concerned with the primacy of a specific form of the subject, the commodity, and the way in which it leads to fetishised relations between those who really create these relationships.

Moreover, speaking of the subject *as such* within a dialectical framework is somewhat inaccurate. Since both Marx's and Hegel's dialectic involve the possibility of the identity of opposites, the subject and object are not two separate entities: instead, at separate moments, one can be either the subject or object, depending on what relation is being described.<sup>20</sup> Thus, one cannot speak of the priority of the subject as such, but rather the priority of a particular subject. So, within such a dialectical framework, it cannot be said flatly that the 'primacy of the subject reigns over and against nature'.<sup>21</sup> As will be seen below, Marx does not make a significant distinction between the subject and nature, since nature is not always the object. Instead, Marx develops a critique of capitalist thought for separating, both in theory and in practice, the unity that exists between humanity and nature as well as in other dualisms. It is the specific social relations between those in society that leads to this separation.

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18 Ibid.

19 Leeb 2007, p. 837.

20. For more on this point, see, for example Ollman 2003, especially Chapter Five.

21. Leeb 2007, p. 838.

### *Naturalism and humanism*

Di Stefano is certainly correct in pointing out that 'in the young Marx especially, we find multiple intimations of a yearning for a more reciprocal relationship between humanity and nature'.<sup>22</sup> However, as discussed above, she sees this as a significant contrast to his later work, where, she argues, humanity seeks to dominate nature. I argue, however, that Marx was relatively consistent on this point from the 1844 *Manuscripts* well into his later works, including *Capital* (Chapter Three) and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Chapter Four). While there are cases in which Marx used language that signified a more heavy-handed approach in terms of humanity's relation to nature, he maintained a commitment to a dialectical understanding of social relations that tended to lead him away from such a dualistic understanding, notwithstanding some occasional ambivalence.

As István Mészáros argues, the 1844 *Manuscripts* provide a basic philosophical starting point for his later work.<sup>23</sup> Especially imperative for understanding Marx's views on the relationship between humanity and nature are the essays 'Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy' and 'Alienated Labour'. The 'Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy' details Marx's differences with both Hegel and Feuerbach as he begins to formulate his own ontology, partly based upon these critiques. The essay 'Alienated Labour' discusses Marx's views on the necessity of labour and, to some extent, humanity's relation to nature.

While Marx makes a strong critique of Hegel, it is important to note the extent to which he also appropriated from him. This critique was certainly not a wholesale rejection of Hegel's method. Instead, Marx criticises the one-sidedly idealist nature of Hegel's system which did not include the actual material world, humanity and the dialectical relationship between the two as mediated by labour.<sup>24</sup> But, even in this form, there was a great deal of use within it: 'the *Phenomenology* is a concealed, unclear and mystifying criticism, but in so far as it grasps the *alienation* of man (even though man appears only as mind) *all* the elements of criticism are contained in it, and are often

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22. Di Stefano 1991b, p. 134.

23. Mészáros 1972, p. 15.

24. Nicholas Lobkowitz states this quite clearly 'In short, Marx does not accuse Hegel of having treated labor as if it were a thought activity. Rather he accuses him of having in the *Phenomenology* described human history in terms of a dialectic consciousness, not in terms of the dialectic of labor. When he shows that the only labor which Hegel recognizes is abstract mental labor, he has in mind the structure of the *Phenomenology* and, in fact, of Hegel's whole philosophy, not the passages of labor in the *Phenomenology* and other writings of Hegel'. Lobkowitz 1967, p. 322.

*presented and worked out in a manner which goes far beyond Hegel's own point of view'.<sup>25</sup>*

Instead of a crude materialism, Marx writes at one point of the need to dialectically unite idealism and materialism, which he referred to as 'consistent naturalism or humanism'.<sup>26</sup> In this essay, Marx tends to point to humanity's materialistic traits, in contrast to Hegel's one-sided idealism, but Marx's theory is not a crude reflectionist system in which consciousness simply mirrors reality; instead, consciousness and nature interact to form reality for humanity.

When real, corporeal *man*, with his feet firmly planted on the solid ground, inhaling and exhaling all the powers of nature, *posits* his real objective *faculties*, as a result of his alienation, as alien objects, the *positing* is not the subject of this act but the subjectivity of *objective* faculties whose action must also therefore be *objective*. An objective being acts objectively, and it would not act objectively if objectivity were not part of its essential being. It creates and establishes *only objects because* it is established by objects, and because it is fundamentally *natural*. In the act of establishing it does not descend from its 'pure activity' to the *creation of objects*; its *objective* product simply confirms its *objective* activity, its activity as an objective, natural being.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, Marx notes humanity's dependence and interaction with nature in contrast to any kind of voluntarist stance involving humanity's ability to transcend nature:<sup>28</sup>

*Man* is directly a *natural being*. As a natural being, and as a living natural being, he is, on the one hand, endowed with *natural powers* and *faculties*, which exist in him as tendencies and abilities, as *drives*. On the other hand, as a natural, embodied, sentient, objective being he is a *suffering*, conditioned and limited being, like animals and plants. The *objects* of his drives exist outside himself as *objects* independent of him, yet they are *objects* of his *needs*, essential *objects* which are indispensable to the exercise and confirmation of his faculties.<sup>29</sup>

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25. Marx 2004, pp. 136–7.

26. Marx 2004, p. 140.

27. Ibid.

28. For an ecofeminist perspective on the relationship between science and industry and nature, see Salleh 1997. See also Foster 1999 on Marx's concept of the 'metabolic rift' that occurred as a result of capitalist development, and especially the separation of town and country.

29. Marx 2004, p. 140.

Here, Marx points out the objective aspects of humanity's existence. Objectively, humans are 'conditioned and limited being[s]' dependent upon other objects for their survival. Thus, humans cannot be pure subjects in any real sense: instead, objects act upon and mould them as well.

However, unlike other animals, human-beings have consciousness of these needs and drives, as well as an understanding of their relationship to the rest of the species:

But man is not merely a natural being, he is a *human* natural being. He is a being for himself, and therefore a *species-being*; and as such he has to express and authenticate himself in being as well as in thought. Consequently, *human* objects are not natural objects as they present themselves directly, nor is *human sense*, as it is immediately and objectively given, *human* sensibility and human objectivity. Neither objective nature nor subjective nature is directly presented in a form adequate to the *human* being. And as everything natural must have its *origin* so *man* has his process of genesis, *history*, which is for him, however, a conscious process and thus one which is consciously self-transcending.<sup>30</sup>

Here, Marx notes the subjective aspect of humanity. While humans have needs that can be satisfied by other objects in nature, these needs are satisfied in particular, human ways based upon the standards of the time.

Furthermore, Marx notes the historical aspect of this process. Here, 'natural' does not refer to a static state of existence but to a 'conscious process' of self-transcendence. Thus, what can be considered natural for humanity is in a constant state of change.<sup>31</sup> Nature can only be understood as existing within a dialectical relation with humanity – rather than as an abstract concept – since '*nature* too, taken abstractly, for itself, and rigidly separated from man, is *nothing* for man'.<sup>32</sup> Here, a rigid conception of a nature/culture dualism and a corresponding man/woman dualism based upon traditional roles seems foreign to Marx's theory, since change and development are themselves natural. While Marx does not discuss the man/woman dualism in these passages, as I will argue below, he does make a similar argument about this dualism in these manuscripts.

For Marx, this process of humanisation of the 'natural' world continues with the abolition of private property and the transition to communism:

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<sup>30</sup> Marx 2004, pp. 141–2.

<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this and how it relates to queer theories, see Grant 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Marx 2004, p. 148.

*Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature through and for man. It is, therefore, the return of man himself as a social, i.e., really human, being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development. Communism as a fully-developed naturalism is humanism and as a fully-developed humanism is naturalism. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution.*<sup>33</sup>

Far from being a one-sided development where humanity dominates nature, Marx posits a dialectical supersession [*Aufhebung*] of this dualism where 'a fully-developed naturalism is humanism and as a fully-developed humanism is naturalism'.

Moreover, this is not only the solution to the dualism between humanity and nature, but since human-beings are social beings that mediate their relations with others through nature, it will also be the solution to the antagonisms that have existed between individuals in class-society:

*The human significance of nature only exists for social man, because only in this case is nature a bond with other men, the basis of his existence for others and of their existence for him. Only then is nature the basis of his own human experience and a vital element of human reality. The natural existence of man has here become his human existence and nature itself has become human for him. Thus society is the accomplished union of man with nature, the veritable resurrection of nature, the realized naturalism of man and the realized humanism of nature.*<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the conflict between nature and society can only truly be resolved when the antagonism between individuals in society is resolved as well: and as we will see below, women's full emancipation is fundamental to this process.

Marx also sees the need to include more than just the abolition of private property as a means for ending this conflict. Social institutions must also be transformed as well: 'Religion, the family, the state, law, morality, science, art, etc. are only particular forms of production and come under its general law. The positive supersession of *private property* as the appropriation of *human life*, is therefore the *positive* supersession of all alienation, and the return of man

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<sup>33</sup> Marx 2004, p. 104.

<sup>34</sup> Marx 2004, p. 105.

from religion, the family, the state, etc. to his *human*, i.e., *social life*'.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Marx points to the need for the family to be transformed as well, although he does not detail this transformation here.

Marx's view of nature is more complex than most of his critics realise. Especially in his early writings, Marx points to the reciprocal and dialectical relation between humanity and nature. It is not necessary for humanity to dominate nature in Marx's vision of a communist society. Instead, external nature is a vital aspect of humanity's own nature, since individuals in any society based on a modestly- to fully-developed division of labour must interact with nature to satisfy their own needs, as well as interact with other members of society. The individual's actions with nature tend to mirror the social relations of the society in question and vice versa. Thus, the hierarchical dualism that is present within capitalist society between nature and culture is historically based and potentially transitory, rather than a natural division. Moreover, due to the ideology of modern society where women are sometimes seen as more biologically based than men, this discussion of nature and culture may also relate indirectly to the position of women in society. This issue will be taken up later in this chapter. While Marx's most significant discussion of the relationship between nature and society occurs in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, there are also a number of other similar statements in his later work as well. This is especially true in *Capital*, Volumes I and III, and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. These texts will be addressed in later chapters.

### *Marx and human nature*

In contrast to Di Stefano and Leeb, who tend to view Marx's silence on certain key issues involving women as very problematic, Holmstrom, while noting Marx's virtual theoretical silence on women's 'nature', argues that his silence on this issue may not be all that problematic. Certainly, he does not focus on the issue of women's 'nature', as opposed to human nature, in any of his theoretical writings: however, Holmstrom argues that his discussion of human nature may be helpful for creating a Marxist position for theorising the relationship between biology and social structures.<sup>36</sup> Particularly important is Marx's concept of historical development, even in terms of biological need. For Marx, we are, and always will be, tied in a very immediate way

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<sup>35</sup> Marx 2004, p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> Holmstrom 1984.



to our biology. However, 'as new needs and capacities are continually being created... human life progressively becomes less directly tied to its biological base'.<sup>37</sup> This is the case because all biological needs are socially mediated, thus, cultural constraints and technology always play a role in biological needs. Moreover, as societies develop, biology as such becomes less and less of a factor.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, for Marx, there is no essential human nature. Instead, there are only 'historically specific forms of human nature, that is, human nature specific to feudalism, to capitalism, to socialism, and so on'.<sup>39</sup> Thus, for Marx, human natures can and do change over time.

From this starting point, Holmstrom begins to extrapolate a theory of women's 'nature' and the potential for changing this 'nature'. Based upon data from a number of cross-cultural studies, she argues that a large portion of women's behavioural patterns are more socially-imposed than biologically-imposed. 'There is, then, what Marxists would call a dialectical interaction between women's labor and their nature. The sexual/social division of labor is the cause of the distinctive cognitive/affective structures that constitute women's nature, and these structures are at least a partial cause of a variety of personality traits and behavior distinctive of women, including the sorts of labor that they do'.<sup>40</sup> Thus, from Marx's basic starting point that individuals are greatly influenced and socialised by the labour that they do, Holmstrom argues that women's distinct nature is far from a biological given. I address this argument further in the discussion of the 1844 *Manuscripts* below.

### *Labour and alienation*

For Marx, an understanding of alienation is crucial to a general understanding of the structure and organisation of modern society. This is even the case, as will be seen below, in understanding relations between men and women. The process of alienation begins with labour, which in its creative form, is the major factor that distinguishes human-beings from animals.<sup>41</sup> Under capitalism, however, labour is no longer primarily creative and is not a life-affirming process: instead, it turns into its opposite. Labour produces goods that stand

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37 Holmstrom 1984, p. 457.

38 Ibid

39 Holmstrom 1984, p. 459.

40 Holmstrom 1984, p. 466.

41 Marx 2004, p. 84.

opposed to it [labor] as an *alien being*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object and turned into a physical thing; this product is an *objectification* of labor. The performance of work is at the same time its objectification.<sup>42</sup>

**Thus the worker produces alienation through her own labour.**

**Alienation is not merely the loss of control over the product. Since the worker produces herself through labour, the conditions of labour will have a profound effect on all aspects of society. This creates a situation in which**

Work is *external* to the worker, that it is not part of his nature; and that, consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, *forced labor*. It is not the satisfaction of need, but only as a *means* for satisfying other needs.<sup>43</sup>

**Marx holds that work, which was originally humanity's means of asserting itself, has become its opposite. Under capitalism, work is no longer something that makes a person human: instead, it is forced upon the worker and degrades her. While in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, Marx only discusses labour in its negative and alienated sense, in *Capital*, he discusses what non-alienated labour would look like. The most essential aspect of non-alienated labour is the unity between thinking and doing:**

A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it. This subordination is no mere momentary act. Apart from the exertion of the working organs, a purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the work. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work and the

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42. Marx 2004, p. 79

43. Marx 2004, p. 82.

way in which it has to be accomplished, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as the free play of his own physical and mental powers, the closer his attention is forced to be<sup>44</sup>

Thus, for Marx, work involves the use of both mental and physical capacities in a creative process of transforming an object into something for human use. Also, contrary to Di Stefano, who argues that in Marx's later work he sees human development as a process of dominating nature,<sup>45</sup> here Marx illustrates the importance of work mediating humanity's relationship with nature:

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature... Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, at least in the beginning of this passage, Marx argues that labour in its non-alienated form consists of a dialectical interchange between humanity and nature and allows for a non-hierarchical understanding of this relationship. Both are important and essential elements in the labour-process. However, his discussion of subjecting nature to 'his own sovereign power' is more problematic. Certainly, this could imply dominance over nature while still maintaining the value that nature brings to the process.

In the French edition of *Capital*, Marx makes the interdependence and non-hierarchical relation of the two much clearer. In this version, the text after the ellipses is replaced with the following: 'At the same time that through this movement he acts upon external nature and modifies it, he modifies his own nature, and develops the potentialities slumbering within it. We are not dealing here with those instinctive forms of labor which remain on an animal level'.<sup>47</sup> Thus, even in his most crucial work on political economy, Marx maintained that humanity and nature had, and must necessarily continue to have, a reciprocal relationship, rather than humanity transcending or dominating nature. To dominate nature would lead to the domination of others, since

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44 Marx 1976, p. 284.

45 Di Stefano 1991a.

46 Marx 1976, p. 283.

47 Marx quoted in Anderson 1998, pp. 133–4. This, as well as a number of other changes that Marx made in this edition of *Capital*, have yet to be incorporated into the English and German versions. For more on this, see Anderson 1998.

for Marx nature is, in a dialectical sense, part of humanity. It is humanity's inorganic body.

The universality of man appears in practice in the universality which makes the whole of nature into his inorganic body: (1) as a direct means of life; and equally (2) as the material object and instrument of his life activity. Nature is the *inorganic body* of man; that is to say, nature excluding the human body itself. To say that man *lives* from nature means that nature is his *body* with which he must remain in a continuous interchange in order not to die. The statement that the physical and mental life of man, and nature, are interdependent means simply that nature is interdependent with itself, for man is a part of nature.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, for Marx, to dominate nature would be to alienate oneself from an important aspect of humanity.

Moreover, in capitalism, labour, which was previously life-affirming and non-alienated, undergoes a dialectical reversal: 'man (the worker) feels himself to be freely active only in his animal functions – eating, drinking and procreating, or at most also in his dwelling and in personal adornment – while in his human functions he is reduced to an animal. The animal becomes human and the human becomes animal'.<sup>49</sup> The individual only feels human in the activities that she shares with animals, while in her truly human function of creative labour, the individual is unable to assert her humanity. Instead of the free conscious activity which develops and transforms humanity, that which makes humanity unique, the species-being, is transformed into its opposite. This alienated form of labour 'makes *species-life* into a means of individual life. In the first place it alienates species-life and individual life, and secondly, it turns the latter, as an abstraction, into the purpose of the former, also in its abstract and alienated form'.<sup>50</sup> Thus, individual life and survival is, in capitalism, the only means of asserting one's species-being, rather than being able to assert it in a more creative and communal form.

In the above, Marx appears to be stating that childbirth and other aspects of labour primarily done by women are not truly human functions, since they do not involve creative labour. This is not the case, however. The next paragraph following the discussion on the animal nature of 'eating, drinking and procreating' points to the need to look at historical and social conditions as well: 'Eating, drinking and procreating are of course also genuine human functions. But abstractly considered, apart from the environment of other

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48. Marx 2004, p. 83.

49. Marx 2004, p. 82.

50. Marx 2004, p. 83.

human activities, and turned into final and sole ends, they are animal functions'.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the conditions under which these activities are carried out are relevant as well. While Marx's discussion of alienated labour does not specifically discuss women's labour, this passage suggests that such a study could be carried out without fundamentally altering Marx's framework, especially in terms of his understanding of the species-being.

Alison Jaggar criticises Marx for adhering to a primarily biologicistic argument in terms of reproduction.<sup>52</sup> She notes that Marx sees biology and social relations as dialectically related, at least in terms of productive activity. The two are not separate phenomena: rather, they each interact to constitute the other.<sup>53</sup> According to Jaggar, the same does not, however, apply in terms of reproductive labour. Here, Marx appears to slip into biological justifications for the division of labour. There is no interaction with society: instead, pure biological determination appears without explanation as to why women are 'naturally' suited for this work.<sup>54</sup>

While Jaggar carried out a valuable study of Marx's concepts of alienation and human nature, I would argue that she misses an important point in Marx's work, because she glosses over some of the nuance of Marx's argument. While it is certainly true that Marx did not specifically address women's labour in a systematic way at any point, passages such as the above illustrate that Marx did not see women's work as primarily biologically dictated or otherwise natural. Rather, biological factors may be relevant, but social organisation and historical context are crucial as well, as Holmstrom argues.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to alienating the labourer from the product of her labour, capitalist alienation produces other more general effects. The worker is alienated from other people as well. This is the case because 'when man confronts himself he also confronts other men. What is true of man's relationship to his work, to the product of his work and to himself, is also true of his relationship to other men, to their labor and to the objects of their labor'.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, alienation exists not just in the workplace, but extends to all social relations. This is especially important to understanding gender-relations.

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51 Marx 2004, p. 82.

52 Jaggar 1983.

53 Jaggar 1983, p. 55.

54 Jaggar 1983, p. 75.

55 Holmstrom 1984.

56 Marx 2004, p. 85.

## Gender in the 1844 *Manuscripts*

### *Alienation and gender*

In the essay 'Private Property and Communism', Marx makes what is perhaps his strongest statement anywhere in his writings on the links between gender and human emancipation. Here, he argues that the general development of society can be judged upon the basis of the relationship between men and women:

The immediate, natural and necessary relation of human being to human being is also the *relation of man* [*Mann*]<sup>57</sup> to *woman* [*Weib*]. In this *natural* species relationship man's [*Mensch*] relation to nature is directly his relation to man [*Mensch*], and his relation to man [*Mensch*] is directly his relation to nature, to his own *natural* function. Thus, in this relation is *sensuously revealed*, reduced to an observable *fact*, the extent to which human nature has become nature for him. From this relationship man's [*Mensch*] whole level of development can be assessed. It follows from the character of this relationship how far *man* [*Mensch*] has become, and has understood himself as, a *species-being*, a *human being*.<sup>58</sup>

Here, Marx is indicating that the relationship between men and women reveals the general degree of alienation. Marx's definition of 'natural', however, here and in *The German Ideology*, does not refer to a fixed biological essence. Instead, it has at least two separate meanings in these texts. First, it refers historically to the spontaneous, unconscious organisation of society. Second, in other places, it refers to a future state in which humanity realises its true potential.<sup>59</sup>

In the first sentence of the above text, where Marx for the first and only time in this selection uses the term 'natural' without italics, he seems to be referring to a biological, ahistorical state: it is biologically necessary that men and women coexist, in terms of reproduction of the species. However, this is only an 'immediate' and abstract statement. Men and women always exist and interact within concrete circumstances mediated by definite social relations. To differentiate his two separate meanings of 'natural' in this

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57. Here, I have inserted the original German to denote those places where Marx is referring to individual men [*Mann*] or women [*Weib*] and when he is referring to humanity [*Mensch*]. This helps to overcome the somewhat sexist language in the translation that Marx does not appear to have intended in the original German.

58. Marx 2004, p. 103.

59. Ring 1991, p. 156.

text, Marx underlines in his manuscript (here rendered in *italics*) the use of 'natural' when it refers to socially-mediated relations that are natural, either in the sense of the 'natural' relations based upon the period in question, or whether future 'natural' relations (existence) would correspond to humanity's essence.

In the second sentence, Marx points to the socially-mediated relationship with nature. Since humans are fundamentally social beings, and since they need to adapt nature to their own needs, the individual's relationship to other individuals will be an objective manifestation of the individual's relation to nature. Here, there appears to be no unbridgeable gulf between society and nature: instead, the two are dialectically related.

From the dialectical interdependence between humanity and nature, Marx posits that it is possible to determine 'the extent to which human nature has become nature for man and to which nature has become human nature for him'.<sup>60</sup> As discussed above, Marx suggests that humanity is in a dialectical relation with nature, in which humanity must constantly interact with the world outside itself in order to survive.<sup>61</sup> Thus, in both thought and action, humanity must understand and interact with nature as a crucial aspect of its life-process and not treat nature outside of itself in an exploitative manner. In this sense, it is possible to deduce humanity's development.

Furthermore, humanity's relation to nature and to others also illustrates 'how far *man* [*Mensch*] has become, and has understood himself as, a *species-being*, a *human being*'.<sup>62</sup> Here again, Marx points to the social nature of humanity. Humans are not simply individuals: they are species-beings, 'not only in the sense that he makes the community (his own as well as those of other things) his object both practically and theoretically, but also (and this is simply another expression for the same thing) in the sense that he treats himself as the present, living species, as a *universal* and consequently free being'.<sup>63</sup>

Marx continues his discussion by positing:

The relation of man [*Mann*] to woman [*Weib*] is the *most natural* relation of human being to human being. It indicates, therefore, how far man's [*Mensch*] *natural* behavior has become *human*, and how far his *human* essence has become a *natural* essence for him, how far his *human nature* has become *nature* for him. It also shows how far man's [*Mensch*] *needs* have become *human*

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Marx 2004, p. 83.

<sup>62</sup> Marx 2004, p. 103.

<sup>63</sup> Marx 2004, p. 83.

needs, and consequently how far the other person [*Mensch*], as a person, has become one of his needs, and to what extent he is in his individual existence at the same time a social being.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, the relation between men and women can be seen as 'natural' in a double sense. First, reproduction is necessary for the continuation of the species. Second, in order for people to exist as true species-beings and live up to their full potential, women must be seen as equal to men. Essential to understanding this passage is Marx's concept of species-being. For Marx, the species cannot be understood with reference to individuals alone. Instead, all are tied to humanity through their consciousness of their link with others and through their activity. When alienated from the species, the individual only views the other person and their alienated activity as a means to something else, such as food, shelter or emotional support. In this case, the person is not valued as an individual member of the species, but only as what can be obtained from the person for the individual.

However, here Marx is writing of a situation where this would no longer be the case. In a fully developed society, the individual values the other individual as such, since she is now a fully developed human-being. In another passage of the 1844 *Manuscripts*, Marx states his case for the need for reciprocity more clearly:

Let us assume *man* [*Mensch*] to be *man* [*Mensch*], and his relation to the world to be a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc. ... If you wish to influence other people you must be a person who really has a stimulating and encouraging effect upon others. Every one of your relations to man [*Mensch*] and to nature must be a *specific expression*, corresponding to the object of your will, of your *real individual* life. If you love without evoking love in return, i.e., if you are not able, by the *manifestation* of yourself as a loving person, to make yourself a *beloved person* then your love is impotent and a misfortune.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, Marx argues above that women are species-beings as well, since 'the relation of man [*Mann*] to woman [*Weib*] is the *most natural* relation of human being to human being'. Thus, in a fully developed society, this form of reciprocity would equally apply to both men and to women. One half of humanity will always be responsible for childbirth, but this does not imply an inevitable inequality between men and women. Women are not an absolute other that exist only in nature and outside of the social sphere.

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64. Marx 2004, p. 103.

65. Marx 2004, p. 131.



Instead, for humanity to reach its full potential, this biological factor must be superseded [*Aufhebung*]. A new unity between humanity and nature must be reached. This, for Marx, is only possible if the gender-inequalities stemming from social organisation are overcome. This occurs historically through the development of technology and the changing mode of production.

### *Feminist theory and the 1844 'Manuscripts'*

A number of feminist scholars have addressed the passage on gender from the 1844 *Manuscripts*. Two significant theorists who have argued that this illustrated Marx's understanding of the position of women and the need for improvement are Simone de Beauvoir and Raya Dunayevskaya.<sup>66</sup> In the conclusion of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir praises this passage from Marx, stating that

The case could not be better stated. It is for man to establish the reign of liberty in the midst of the world of the given. To gain the supreme victory, it is necessary, for one thing, that by and through their natural differentiation men and women unequivocally affirm their brotherhood.<sup>67</sup>

While this passage from de Beauvoir points to the necessity for reciprocity between men and women, the context of the conclusion points to a much greater role for men than for women in achieving this. It is not exactly clear, from the above quote, whether or not the use of 'man' refers to men or to humanity as a whole, since neither French nor English make such a distinction as Marx was able to make in German. Other parts of the conclusion provide evidence that men must liberate women, rather than women liberating themselves, since 'it is not a question of abolishing in women the contingencies and miseries of the human condition but of *giving her the means of transcending them*'.<sup>68</sup> As with much of the rest of her text, de Beauvoir sees very little subjectivity for women, both historically and in the period in which she was writing. Men would eventually see that it is in their interest to raise women to a status equal to themselves.

Dunayevskaya offers a different reading of this passage from Marx.<sup>69</sup> What she sees as most essential in this passage is Marx's emphasis on the depth of social change that is necessary for a socialist society to function. 'The Man/Woman relationship ... [is] integral to alienation'.<sup>70</sup> Marx's break with liberalism

<sup>66</sup> See de Beauvoir 1989 and Dunayevskaya 1985

<sup>67</sup> De Beauvoir 1989, p. 732.

<sup>68</sup> De Beauvoir 1989, p. 727, emphasis added.

<sup>69</sup> Dunayevskaya 1985

<sup>70</sup> Dunayevskaya 1985, p. 191.

and his formulation of 'new Humanism' called for a very deep transformation of society that could only occur if women gained equal status to men since, contrary to de Beauvoir's reading of Marx, woman is not the absolute other of man. Instead, in order for men to become truly human and become a species-being, it is necessary to uproot the longstanding oppression of women.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, Dunayevskaya departs from de Beauvoir in another significant way. While Marx's statement does not deal with women's subjectivity directly, and de Beauvoir takes this as evidence for her own argument, Dunayevskaya points to the need to see Marx's writings through today's vantage-point. The women's movement had to develop its own ideas and its own movement of liberation before Marx's (admittedly abstract) formulation on this topic could be concretised.<sup>72</sup> Thus, Marx saw the need for an end to women's oppression in order to create a new society, but only further historical development could illustrate that women could be subjects in their own right. Later writings from Marx illustrate that he was at least beginning to see the historical importance of women as subjects. This will be addressed more directly in later chapters.

Other feminist scholars have been much more critical of this passage, however. Juliet Mitchell provided what became a standard critique of this passage.<sup>73</sup> For Mitchell, Marx is largely repeating Fourier's abstract statements on the 'index of humanisation in the civic sense of the victory of humanness over brutality, but in the more fundamental sense of the progress of the human over the animal, the cultural over the natural' which implies also the victory of society and culture (men) over the natural (women).<sup>74</sup> This reading of Marx is somewhat problematic, however. Mitchell ignores Marx's emphasis throughout the 1844 *Manuscripts* on reunifying the 'natural' and social spheres. In his 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic', Marx states that his theory can be considered a 'consistent naturalism'.<sup>75</sup> The natural and social spheres are dialectically related and cannot be separated.<sup>76</sup> Thus, for Marx, the historical development of humanity does not consist in overcoming or dominating nature through science and culture, but rather involves simultaneous developments in the relationships in both the cultural and 'natural' spheres.

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71. Dunayevskaya 1985, pp. 191–2.

72. Dunayevskaya 1985, p. 192.

73. Mitchell 1971.

74. Mitchell 1971, p. 77.

75. Marx 2004, p. 140.

76. Marx 2004, p. 83.

*'Crude Communism',<sup>77</sup> private property, and women*

Within the same essay, Marx offers a critique of the ideas of those who criticised class-society but were unable to go beyond this critique and posit a totally new society based on a very different mode of production and new social relations. These socialists saw communism as merely a process of levelling which 'aims to destroy everything which is incapable of being possessed by everyone as private property. It wishes to eliminate talent, etc. by force. Immediate physical possession seems to it the unique goal of life and existence'.<sup>78</sup> This 'crude communism' illustrates 'how little this abolition of private property represents a genuine appropriation [and] is shown by the abstract negation of the whole world of culture and civilization, and the regression to the *unnatural* simplicity of the poor and wantless individual who has not only not surpassed private property but has not yet even attained to it'.<sup>79</sup> Thus, this form of communism is actually an attempt to return to a time before the introduction of private property instead of an effort to overcome the contradictions of the capitalist system.

Moreover, in what some later took as a prescient critique of the Soviet and Chinese models of Communism, Marx notes the way in which the contradictions of class-society are glossed over in an attempt to impose a false universal: 'The community is only a community of *work* and of *equality of wages* paid out by the communal capital, by the *community* as universal capitalist. The two sides of the relation are raised to a *supposed* universality; *labor* as a condition in which everyone is placed, and *capital* as the acknowledged universality and power of the community'.<sup>80</sup> Thus, what is universalised is the

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77 It is not exactly clear who Marx was speaking about, however, Dirk J. Struik provides a few possibilities: 'Marx probably attacks as "crude communism" various opinions that he may have heard in Babouvist circles, perhaps also expressed in long forgotten pamphlets. Neither Babeuf nor Buonarotti stood for the destruction of talents or the "community of women" There was a Babouvist poet Sylvain Maréchal, who in 1796 proposed a *Manifeste des Egaux* with exclamations such as this: "Let, if necessary, all arts perish, if only real equality be reached!" The Babouvist leadership rejected it. Community of women, as far as we know, was never preached by any socialist or communist, the closest to it may have been Plato, whose aristocratic Guards had no marriage ties, but men and women were considered equals in the selection of partners. Dézamy's *Code de la nature* (1842) suggested something similar for his whole utopian community. Communist sects have occasionally preached polygamy, e.g., some Anabaptists of the 16th century. We may remember how Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* ridiculed the idea that communists are in favour of the community of women; on the contrary, they wrote, this is an established bourgeois custom, if not in theory, the more in practice.' Marx 2001, p. 244.

78 Marx 2004, p. 102.

79 Ibid.

80 Marx 2004, p. 103.

contradictory nature of capitalism that separates the worker both from the means of production and power over production. This 'supposed universality' can only be a temporary solution since 'it has not yet grasped the positive nature of private property, or the *human* nature of needs, it is still captured and contaminated by private property. It has well understood the concept, but not the essence'.<sup>81</sup>

Marx illustrates this further through his discussion of marriage and the views of the crude communists who tend to see it as 'incontestably a form of *exclusive private property*'.<sup>82</sup> Women are seen as the property of men. In this social relation, which, at first glance, has little to do with the economic relationships, take on specific characteristics of relationships involving capitalist private property where only basic ownership and control is important

Private property has made us so stupid and partial that an object is only *ours* when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or when it is directly eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., in short, *utilized* in some way, although private property itself only conceives these various forms of possession as *means of life*, and the life for which they serve as means is the *life of private property* – labor and the creation of capital.

Thus *all* the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple alienation of *all* these senses; the sense of *having*. The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order to be able to give birth to all his inner wealth.<sup>83</sup>

Here, Marx points to the ways in which capitalism has limited all human senses and feeling to mere possession. Everything, including women, is a commodity to be owned and utilised. Capitalism is not the final outcome, however. It is only a necessary stage where humanity is, in theory and in practice, reduced to the mere abstraction of a commodity. Since humanity is much more than this, however, 'this absolute poverty' will, in the end, 'give birth to all his inner wealth'.

Marx continues his discussion of the crude communists who do not see the need to improve women's position: 'In the relationship with *woman*, as the prey and the handmaid of communal lust, is expressed the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself; for the secret of this relationship finds its *unequivocal, incontestable, open* and revealed expression in the relation of man to woman and in the way in which the *direct* and *natural* species relationship is

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81. Ibid.

82. Marx 2004, p. 102.

83. Marx 2004, p. 107.

conceived'.<sup>84</sup> Here, women are collective property instead of private property, but neither their situation nor that of the men in society has improved. In this type of society, women still only exist for men's enjoyment, in the same way that private property is for one person's exclusive enjoyment. Here, nothing has changed, other than who actually holds the property-title. Property itself, as exclusive enjoyment of an object, human or inanimate, still exists. In this case, relations between persons are still very individualistic and egoistic, in contrast to a situation where individuals could move beyond this egoism and view others in society as valuable as such, rather than as solely providers of goods and services.

For Marx, as with the above passage on the man/woman relationship, this illustrates the impoverished nature of the society as a whole. Under capitalism, human-beings are only concerned with their own individual enjoyment and only see others as the potential fulfilment of their needs, rather than as whole human-beings with needs of their own. Here again, Marx points out the necessity of women's full liberation and equality with men as a prerequisite to a truly socialist society. Certainly, the alternatives to collective ownership in this crude form of private property do not necessitate equality between men and women. However, Marx's statement arguing that women are species-beings as well as men, points very strongly in this direction.

### **Women's alienation in capitalist society**

In *The Holy Family*, Marx's first publication with Engels,<sup>85</sup> there is a significant discussion of gender within Marx's critique of Szeliga's analysis of French socialist Eugène Sue's novel, *Les Mystères de Paris*. In this book, Sue relates the stories of a number of characters from various classes in Paris during the 1840s. His purpose is to entice the wealthier classes to engage in philanthropic activities similar to those of his main character, Rudolph. Rudolph was a minor German prince who, in order to atone for his past misdeeds, set out to 'recompense the good, punish the bad, solace those who suffer, probe all wounds of humanity, [and] to endeavour to snatch souls from perdition'.<sup>86</sup>

Responding to this text, Marx discusses the characters Fleur de Marie, a Paris prostitute, and Louise Morel, a sexually-exploited servant of a bourgeois

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<sup>84</sup> Marx 2004, p. 103.

<sup>85</sup> While *The German Ideology* was a collaborative project, in which it is impossible to know for sure which parts were contributed by each, the chapters in *The Holy Family* were written separately by Marx and Engels and the authorship of each chapter is noted in the 1845 published version.

<sup>86</sup> Sue n.d., pp. 385–6.

man. Here, Marx illustrates his humanism as well as his disdain for bourgeois society – this in contrast to both Sue and Szeliga's moralistic commentary. Marx describes Fleur de Marie as a person with 'vitality, energy, cheerfulness, elasticity of character – qualities which alone explain her human development in her *inhuman* situation'.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, despite her situation, Marx does not see her as merely a powerless victim, but as possessing agency: 'She does not appear as a defenseless lamb who surrenders without any resistance to overwhelming brutality; she is a girl that can vindicate her rights and put up a fight'.<sup>88</sup> Thus, Fleur de Marie expresses her subjectivity in two ways. First, she is able to maintain her love of life and hope for the future, despite her oppressive economic and social situation. Second, she is strong enough both physically and mentally to defend herself. Her resort to prostitution is a result of socio-economic factors, rather than character-flaws.

Marx was also impressed by her world-view and how little she was affected by the ideology of bourgeois society:

*Good and evil, in Marie's mind, are not the moral abstractions of good and evil. She is good because she has never caused suffering to anybody, she has always been human towards her inhuman surroundings. ... She is good because she is still young, full of hope and vitality. Her situation is not good because it does her unnatural violence, because it is not the expression of her human impulses, the fulfillment of her human desires; because it is full of torment and void of pleasure. She measures her situation in life by her own individuality, her natural essence, not by the ideal of good. In natural surroundings the chains of bourgeois life fall off Fleur de Marie; she can freely manifest her own nature and consequently is bubbling with love of life, with a wealth of feeling, with human joy at the beauty of nature; these show that the bourgeois system has only grazed the surface of her and is a mere misfortune, that she herself is neither good nor bad, but human.*<sup>89</sup>

Fleur de Marie judged her actions not by abstract criteria of the morality of the time, but by how her activities affected herself and others. For Marx, she is an example of the yearning to be truly human. Her own material circumstances limit her ability to overcome obstacles and assert her individuality more directly, however.

While the priest put in charge of her 'spiritual rebirth' condemns her for being sinful and not adhering to Christian morality, Marx points to the real reason why Fleur de Marie was forced into prostitution: 'The hypocritical

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87. Marx and Engels 1956, p. 225.

88. Ibid.

89. Marx and Engels 1956, p. 226.

priest knows quite well that at every hour of the day, in the busiest streets, those virtuous people of Paris go past little girls of 7 or 8 years selling matches and the like up to midnight as Marie herself used to do and who, almost without exception, will have the same fate as Marie'.<sup>90</sup> Here, Marx points out the difficult situation faced by working-class girls and women. As members of the proletariat, they have nothing to sell but their own labour and, when there is not enough productive work, women are forced to sell their bodies in order to survive.

This is a natural outgrowth of capitalism. As Marx argued in the 1844 *Manuscripts* in the essay 'Needs, Production, and Division of Labour', under capitalism everything is commodified, despite the apparent contradictions within the separate ideological spheres:

Everything which you own must be made *venal*, i.e., useful. Suppose I ask the economist: am I acting in accordance with economic laws if I earn money by the sale of my body, by prostituting it to another person's lust (in France, the factory workers call the prostitution of their wives and daughters the *nth* hour of work, which is literally true)... He will reply you are not acting contrary to my laws, but you must take into account what Cousin Morality and Cousin Religion have to say.... The nature of alienation implies that each sphere applies a different and contradictory norm, that morality does not apply the same norm as political economy, etc., because each of them is a particular alienation of man; each is concentrated upon a specific area of alienated activity and is itself alienated from the other.<sup>91</sup>

Humanity is not valued as such. Instead, it is only valuable when a profit can be made from its labour. The fractured nature of life under capitalism, and thus the fractured nature of consciousness as well, lead to a situation in which religion, morality, and economics are seen as separate spheres, even though they are fundamentally related. Here, again, Marx points to the need for a total critique and transformation of society, in which human life and activity is the primary concern.

Leeb provides a slightly different reading of Marx's discussion of Fleur de Marie.<sup>92</sup> She argues that Marx criticised Sue for his one-sided focus on the mind at the expense of the body: 'The general aim of this discussion is to show us that the one-sided focus on the mind leads to hostility towards the flesh (the body), which results in the *Entleibung* (disembodiment) of Fleur de Marie

<sup>90</sup> Marx and Engels 1956, p. 229.

<sup>91</sup> Marx 2004, pp. 116–17.

<sup>92</sup> Leeb 2007.

and her eventual death'.<sup>93</sup> Here, Leeb is correct in pointing to Marx's concern with Sue's 'one-sided focus on the mind'. However, Marx's focus is not just upon the mind as an abstract concept, but as a specific form of mind.

The state that Fleur de Marie finds herself in the beginning of the story is also one of alienation. While Marx praises her for not sinking into despair and for showing human qualities within an inhuman situation, her consciousness remained a relatively unmediated one. Her consciousness of her humanity and her ability to assert that humanity were at odds. She had very little control over her body or her life-situation in general, thus she could only 'freely manifest her own nature ... with human joy at the beauty of nature' in 'natural surroundings' and not in 'bourgeois life'.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, it is much more likely that Marx was making a critique of the particular form of mind that the priest imparted to her.

This is especially true in Marx's discussion of Fleur de Marie's entry into the nunnery and her death soon thereafter. In this regard, Marx states that 'Convent life does not suit Marie's individuality – she dies. Christianity consoles her only in imagination, or rather her Christian consolation is precisely the annihilation of her real life and essence – her death'.<sup>95</sup> Here, Leeb is correct in stating that Marx's argument is against 'Christianity's primary focus on an abstract mind that aims to get rid of the body'.<sup>96</sup> However, she takes this argument too far when she states that Marx is only 'concerned with preserving the body "flesh" of the (beautiful, young) working-class woman'.<sup>97</sup> In the above quote, Marx is not only pointing to the hierarchical opposition between the mind and body that is prevalent in Christian thought and places the mind above the body: rather, Marx also notes that the 'consolation' that she receives is one-sided and imaginary, since it only focuses on the mind at the expense of the body. Thus, according to Marx, it is the inability to reconcile the two, rather than just the extreme focus on consciousness, that leads to her death.

Another character that Marx discusses in *The Holy Family* is Louise Morel, a young woman who is forced to work as a servant for a notary in order to support her sick parents and siblings. While she is working in this house, she is raped and impregnated by her boss. Later, when the child dies during birth, the notary accuses the girl of infanticide in order to get rid of her.

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93 Leeb 2007, pp. 846–7

94 Marx 1956, p. 226.

95 Marx and Engels 1956, p. 234.

96 Leeb 2007, p. 847.

97. Ibid.



Here, Marx criticises the comments that Rudolph makes concerning this situation. While Rudolph sees the need for laws to punish the master for exploitation of the servant, for Marx this is not enough:

Rudolph's reflections do not go so far as to make the *condition of servants* the object of his most gracious Criticism. Being a *petty* ruler himself, he is a *great* advocate of the condition of servants. Still less does he proceed to grasp the general condition of women in modern society as an inhuman one.<sup>98</sup>

Criminalisation is not enough, as English law illustrates: 'He only needed to look round at legislation in other countries. *English* laws fulfill all his wishes. In their delicacy... they go so far as to declare it *felony* [sic] to seduce a prostitute'.<sup>99</sup> Since 'the general condition of women in modern society [is] an inhuman one', legislation is insufficient: the position of women must be ameliorated.

In these passages of *The Holy Family*, Marx makes a number of relatively strong criticisms of women's oppression in capitalist society. In the case of Fleur de Marie, Marx notes the difficult economic circumstances that she faced and how this severely limited her opportunities. While Rudolph saved her from her physical debasement, her situation was not much better in the nunnery. Here, she was just as alienated, since her Christian values forced her to completely ignore her body and focus on the supposed crimes that she had committed, even though they were no fault of her own. Louise Morel faced similar difficulties as a working-class woman, and here Marx notes both her exploitation by her boss and the need, at a more general level, to fundamentally change the conditions in which women live in modern society.

## Modes of production and the course of history

*The German Ideology* contains Marx and Engels's first collaborative, systematic discussion of their concept of historical materialism. While the primary goal of this study was a criticism of the young Hegelians, it also contains a positive explication of their own theory of society, including a significant discussion of gender and the family. As in Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, they see the beginning of alienation and class-society as stemming from the division of labour. As the division of labour becomes more complex, different forms of property also come into existence, but, most importantly, there is a social

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<sup>98</sup> Marx and Engels 1956, p. 258.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

aspect that is at work as well. The mode of production and other material factors help to structure society:

This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. Hence what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production.<sup>100</sup>

Marx and Engels were not making a deterministic statement here. Both objective and subjective factors are crucial in understanding society and social change. Material conditions are very important to understanding society, but there is also a subjective element involved as well: 'circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances'.<sup>101</sup>

### *The family and class-society*

Marx and Engels's discussion of the family in *The German Ideology* revolves mostly around the origins of the family and class-society. They see the two as tied together, although not in a completely unilinear way. They argue that the original division of labour was based on the sexual division of labour in reproduction: 'the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act, then the division of labour which develops spontaneously or "naturally" by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g., physical strength), needs, accidents, etc., etc. Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears'.<sup>102</sup>

It is valuable here to note their use of the word 'natural'. Here, as in other places within *The German Ideology*, and as discussed earlier in regard to the 1844 *Manuscripts*, they appear to be using this word in a dialectical sense. 'Natural', in this case, does not refer to a fixed essence: instead, it refers to a state which appears natural to those within the society.<sup>103</sup> In this sense, what is natural can change based on the society in question. There are objective and subjective factors that enter into this determination of what is 'natural'. Thus, when they state that there is a natural division of labour between the sexes,

100. Marx and Engels 1998, p. 37.

101. Marx and Engels 1998, p. 62.

102. Marx and Engels 1998, p. 50.

103. Marx often used the word 'natural' to denote precapitalist economies where labour is not subsumed under capital.

this does not mean that they are taking a biological view of gender. Instead, they appear to be arguing that biology only relates to the reproduction of the species and not necessarily the care of the young. This is instead left to 'natural' factors that will vary with the type of social order in which they exist, albeit, up to this point, there has not been a great deal of variation involving labour dealing with the reproduction of the species.

The statement about the division of labour really only appearing when the division between mental and manual labour takes place has also been seen as problematic by a number of feminist scholars.<sup>104</sup> As Mies notes, the first division of labour, that of procreation, is seen by Marx and Engels as 'natural' while the second division of labour, the division between mental and manual labour, is seen as the first social division of labour. This, she writes, is problematic because 'by separating the production of new life from the production of the daily requirements through labour, by elevating the latter to the realm of history and humanity and by calling the first "natural", the second "social" they have involuntarily contributed to the biological determinism which we still suffer today'.<sup>105</sup>

Mies is certainly correct in pointing to the ambiguity within Marx and Engels here. They appear to prioritise the division between mental and manual labour and see procreation as primarily biological. Another reading is possible, however. As discussed above, 'natural' for Marx and Engels does not necessarily carry the same meaning as in common discourse. Additionally, the priority that Marx and Engels give to the division between mental and manual labour is not necessarily that it is the first social relation, but that it is the first *exploitative* social relation. The division of labour only becomes oppressive when the worker loses control over the creative process, which necessarily occurs with the division between mental and manual labour.

Marx and Engels continue their discussion on the division of labour. The division of labour in both production and reproduction has a dual character. There are both natural and social aspects involved: 'The production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a twofold relation: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relation – social in the sense that it denotes the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. ... Thus it is quite obvious from the start that there exists a materialist connection of men with one another, which is determined by their needs and their mode of production, and which is as old as men themselves'.<sup>106</sup> Here, Marx and Engels's

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104 Mies 1998, p. 51

105 Mies 1998, p. 52

106 Marx and Engels 1998, pp. 48–9.

focus is on the overall mode of production. At this point, they only take up the issue of production and not that of reproduction.

Later, however, they discuss the inequalities within the family. For Marx and Engels, the family contains the beginnings of class-society:

The division of labour in which all these contradictions are implicit, and which in its turn is based on the natural division of labour in the family and the separation of society into individual families opposed to one another, simultaneously implies the *distribution*, and indeed the *unequal* distribution, both quantitative and qualitative, of labour and its products, hence property, the nucleus, the first form of which lies in the family, where wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first form of property, but even at this stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists, who call it the power of disposing of the labour-power of others.<sup>107</sup>

Here, Marx and Engels point to the importance of the family to the development of class-society. As in other places in the text, they appear to be using 'natural' only in the sense of being spontaneous and unplanned, instead of being based on any fixed biology. The organisation of the family is conditioned by the general development of society. Only certain family-structures can occur at a definite stage of development.

Moreover, at this early stage of development, the family is a much more fundamental unit of society than in more developed societies. Without a developed state, the family is one of the few sources of authority in society. Since the social structure and material conditions mutually influence each other, the economic organisation of society will have an effect on the family-structure. Thus, the family will be one of the first places where the effects of the division of labour will be seen.

This particular division of labour leads to the oppression of women and children in the family. They became slaves of the men of the family, since men are the ones to acquire property, including the women and children. The male head of household has the power to dispose of the labour-power of the other members of his family. This will be the germ of development for class-antagonisms in the future. This is the case, Marx and Engels point out, because the beginning of social antagonism through the division of labour is not merely an internal relation. Instead, relations with other families and perhaps even other tribes or clans could develop with similar antagonisms. Thus Marx and Engels are arguing, at least indirectly, that since the origin

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107. Marx and Engels 1998, pp. 51–2.

of class-society exists in the family, a classless society cannot be created and maintained so long as familial and gender-oppression exists. Any attempts at creating such a classless society without dealing with this problem would maintain the primary contradiction within the division between mental and physical labour, and thus recreate the social antagonisms that a classless society was intending to eliminate. Therefore, although Marx and Engels do not discuss gender-inequality in great detail, for them it seems to be something that must be dealt with in the process of creating a new society and not something that will come about automatically as a result of a socialist revolution. Moreover, while their discussion of the origins of gender-inequality and class-society is vague, abstract, and – regarding the patriarchal origin of the family – incorrect,<sup>108</sup> this is not the final formulation of these ideas. Marx and Engels took up these issues again in the 1880s, when more anthropological evidence was available and modified their positions. This material will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

### *On the 'bourgeois family'*

Later, in their discussion and critique of Max Stirner in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels note the historical nature of the family. It is impossible to speak of the 'family "as such"'.<sup>109</sup> Instead, one must look at the historical context and especially the social relations involved in production. Marx and Engels criticise Stirner for not understanding the difference between the bourgeois ideal of the family and the phenomena where individual families are being dissolved. They note the necessary hypocrisy of this form of the family:

The dissolute bourgeois evades marriage and secretly commits adultery; the merchant evades the institution of property by depriving others of property by speculation, bankruptcy, etc.; the young bourgeois makes himself independent of his own family, if he can by in fact abolishing the family as far as he is concerned. But marriage, property, the family remain untouched in theory, because they are the practical basis on which the bourgeoisie has erected its domination, and because in their bourgeois form they are the conditions which make the bourgeois a bourgeois. . . . This attitude of the bourgeois to the conditions of his existence acquires one of its universal forms in bourgeois morality.<sup>110</sup>

108 See for example: Reiter 1975, Dunayevskaya 1991, and Leacock 1972.

109 Marx and Engels 1998, p. 195.

110 Marx and Engels 1998, pp. 194–5.

Here, Marx and Engels note that the ideological form of the family is one-sided. In order for bourgeois morality to exist, it is also necessary that its opposite also exists. The ideological generalities are based on a one-sided assessment of the family. The bourgeois family as it has developed historically contains 'boredom and money... [as] the binding link, and which also includes the bourgeois dissolution of the family'.<sup>111</sup> 'Obedience, piety, fidelity in marriage, etc.' may be the ideological and moral element of the family 'but the real body of the family... [is] the property relation, the exclusive attitude in relation to other families, forced cohabitation – relations determined by the existence of children, the structure of modern towns, the formation of capital, etc'.<sup>112</sup> The family in its bourgeois form 'continues to exist even in the nineteenth century, only the process of its dissolution has become more general, not on the account of the concept, but because of the higher development of industry and competition; the family still exists although its dissolution was long ago proclaimed by French and English Socialists'.<sup>113</sup>

Marx and Engels argue that the bourgeois family, based on 'boredom and money' as the 'binding link', as well as its 'official phraseology and universal hypocrisy', is necessary to the maintenance of capitalism.<sup>114</sup> The family has existed in other forms and will continue to exist so long as the repressive relations of capitalism remain.<sup>115</sup> Thus, as Marx claims in his 'Theses on Feuerbach' 'once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be destroyed in theory and in practice'.<sup>116</sup>

### **Alienation, bourgeois morality and suicide**

In an 1846 article published in *Gesellschaftsspiegel* ['Mirror of Society'], Marx makes his first and only published attempt to study the causes of suicide.<sup>117</sup> While a majority of this essay is Marx's translation into German of parts of Jacques Peuchet's<sup>118</sup> essay on suicide in early-nineteenth-century French society, this article indicates Marx's views on the importance of gender-relations

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111 Marx and Engels 1998, p. 195.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

116 Marx 1998, p. 570.

117 For a more detailed discussion of Peuchet's study and the context of Marx's article, see Anderson 1999.

118 Peuchet (1758–1830) held a number of posts in the administration of the French police, including a high-level position in the Paris police-archives. It was from his *Memoirs from the Police Archives* (1838) that Marx took his information for the 'suicide' essay. Anderson 1999, pp. 11–12.

to understanding and developing a critique of society in a number of respects. First, those parts of Peuchet that Marx excerpts deal primarily with the suicide of middle-class women. Second, while a majority of the text is directly taken from Peuchet, in a few places, Marx surreptitiously adds his own comments. In other places, he alters Peuchet's text somewhat, through his translation and by deleting sections of the French author's discussion of these specific cases. Often in these cases, Marx is removing Peuchet's passages that contain moralistic commentary. Third, this is a somewhat unusual topic for Marx to address. It deals primarily with familial and other forms of oppression within the private sphere. As Michael Löwy notes, this essay 'amounts to a passionate protest against patriarchy, the enslavement of women, including bourgeois women, and the oppressive nature of the bourgeois family. With few exceptions, there is nothing like it in Marx's later writings'.<sup>119</sup>

Marx begins his essay with a brief discussion of the significance of Peuchet's inquiry into the causes of suicide. While Peuchet certainly was not a socialist writer, Marx seemed to think that there was still a great deal that could be learned from his study. Furthermore, Marx argues that accounts like this illustrate that even members of the bourgeoisie are alienated: 'it may show the extent to which it is the conceit of the benevolent bourgeoisie that the only issues are providing some bread and some education to the proletariat, as if only the workers suffer from present social conditions, but that, in general, this is the best of all possible worlds'.<sup>120</sup> Here, Marx is arguing that economic levelling or redistribution are not enough to create a better society, so long as capitalist social relations remain in place. Instead, total social transformation is necessary.

Within this essay/translation, Marx addresses the topic of alienation in a more concrete way than in the 1844 *Manuscripts*. Here, it is not the economic and social origins of alienation that are dealt with, but instead some of the manifestations of alienation. Suicide is one of the most extreme of these. Marx quotes Peuchet to the effect that extreme social isolation can lead to suicide: '*In fact, what kind of society is it wherein one finds the most profound loneliness in the midst of many millions of people, a society where one can be overwhelmed by an uncontrollable urge to kill oneself without anyone of us suspecting it? This society is no society, but, as Rousseau said, a desert populated by wild animals*'.<sup>121</sup> Here, as in a number of other places in this essay, Marx focuses, through his selections from Peuchet, on the alienation of human-beings from each other as a key social problem.

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119. Löwy 2002, p. 5.

120. Marx 1999, p. 45.

121. Marx 1999, p. 50.

While this type of alienation can certainly be seen in the public sphere, as Marx notes, alienation and its deleterious effects extend into the private familial sphere as well. In his introduction to Peuchet's essay, Marx argues that political revolution is insufficient. The structures of private life will also have to be uprooted as well: 'With Jacques Peuchet, as with many older French practitioners (now mostly deceased) who lived through the numerous upheavals since 1789 – the numerous deceptions, enthusiasms, constitutions, rulers, defeats, and victories – there appeared a critique of the existing property, family, and other private relationships (in a word, of private life) as the necessary consequence of their political experiences'.<sup>122</sup>

This is especially true in the case of the bourgeois family after the French Revolution: '*The revolution did not topple all tyrannies. The evil which one blames on arbitrary forces exists in families, where it causes crises, analogous to those of revolutions*'.<sup>123</sup> Here, Marx highlights through his emphasis on Peuchet's text the notion that the bourgeois family remained an oppressive institution even after the overthrow of the *ancien régime*. Read at a more general level, this could also apply as a prescient critique of later political and economic revolutions, some of which were made in the name of Marxism but did not uproot other oppressive relations. This is especially true in the former Soviet Union and its allies in Eastern Europe, China and Cuba, where women's position did not improve significantly in most cases. For example, the progress that was made in the Soviet Union on gender just after the Revolution was abrogated during Stalin's dictatorship.

Marx continues with Peuchet's text after deleting a passage of Peuchet's moral condemnation of oppressive family-relations<sup>124</sup> stating that it is

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122. Marx 1999, p. 45

123. Marx 1999, pp. 50–1. This is Peuchet's text, but the emphasis is Marx's.

124. Here, Marx deletes the following from Peuchet's text: 'Can one be sure, as it is commonly believed, that the fear of seeing one's friends, parents, or servants subjected to infamy, and their bodies dragged through the mud, could bring these pitiless men to be more prudent, moderate, and fair toward their subordinates, and to go so far as to prevent these voluntary murders, committed in order to extract oneself from their domination? I do not think so. Believing this would only be a double blasphemy, and would refuse due respect to both the living and the dead. It is hard to see how such a method could succeed; wisely, it has been renounced

'In order to improve the attitude of superiors toward their subordinates, especially that of parents among the former, it has been thought that the fear of seeing oneself hit by aspersion and public scandal would be an effective measure. This measure would not suffice. The bitter blame that one gladly pours over the unfortunate one, who has taken his life, diminishes among those who instigated the suicide. However, it does not extinguish this feeling in them, the shame brought by all the scandals, and the awareness of having been the true instigators of the suicide. It seems to me that the clergy is even less religious than society, when it sides with these cowardly prejudices by refusing a religious burial'. Marx 1999, p. 51.



necessary to create new relations in the family: 'We must first create, from the ground up, the connections between the interests and dispositions, the true relations among individuals. *Suicide is only one of the thousand and one symptoms of the general social struggle ever fought out on new ground*'.<sup>125</sup> Again and again, Marx emphasises the social element involved in suicide. Suicide, for Marx, is not just an individual act of desperation. As with all other aspects of society, the causes of suicide cannot be separated from social conditions. Furthermore, Marx is emphasising that suicide is also a form of resistance in an oppressive society.

After this brief discussion of the general state of society and its relation to suicide, Marx begins to excerpt four of Peuchet's cases. The first of these involves a woman who is verbally derided and publicly humiliated by her family when they discover that she has lost her virginity after returning home from spending the night at her fiancé's house. In the middle of Peuchet's description of these events, Marx adds his own comments on the bourgeois family: 'Those who are most cowardly, who are least capable of resistance themselves, become unyielding as soon as they *can exert absolute parental authority*. The abuse of *that authority* also serves as a *cruel substitute* for all the submissiveness and dependency people in bourgeois society acquiesce in, *willingly or unwillingly*'.<sup>126</sup> Here, Marx provides a strong critique of the existing bourgeois family and the power-relations that exist within it.

While Marx does point to factors outside of the family that give rise to these conditions, he is certainly not engaging in economic reductionism. Instead, similarly to his discussion of alienation in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, Marx sees a dialectical relationship between 'absolute parental authority' and the 'submissiveness and dependency' of the bourgeoisie. Members of the bourgeoisie have relinquished much of their subjectivity to market-forces, and in its place have substituted parental authority over their children. While it is not necessarily the case that this authority is detrimental to the child, the economic relations outside of the family tend to imprint themselves on all social relations. Thus familial oppression is tied to other forms of oppression.

The next case that Marx addresses involves a woman who is held in virtual slavery by her husband. The woman's disfigured husband is quite jealous. He forces her to remain in the house, accuses her of infidelity and forces her to have sex with him. Here, Marx again ties women's oppression to the general conditions in society, but without minimising the oppression faced by women: 'The unfortunate woman was condemned to unbearable slavery and

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125 Ibid.

126 Marx 1999, pp. 53-4.

M. de M. exercised his slaveholding rights, supported by the civil code and the right of property. These were based on social conditions which deem love to be unrelated to the spontaneous feelings of the lovers, but which permit the jealous husband to fetter his wife in chains, like a miser with his hoard of gold, for she is but a part of his inventory'.<sup>127</sup> In this passage, Marx notes two principal aspects of women's oppression. The first of these is institutional. The law itself recognises the authority of the husband over his wife. The second involves social relations more generally. A capitalist society creates relations in which everything is commodified, including people. The unequal relationship between men and women, which has not and will not be solved by capitalist society, has been absorbed into the *modus operandi* of capitalism itself. Women are treated as mere commodities and not as human subjects.

At this point, Marx relates this to the general alienation that exists in capitalist society. As discussed above, the relation between men and women illustrates for Marx the general development of society as a whole. For Marx, this case illustrates the selfishness of man and thus his alienation from the rest of humanity. Woman only exists as property and not as a fellow human-being: 'The jealous man requires a slave he can love, but that love is only a hand-maiden for his jealousy. *Above all, the jealous man is a private property owner*'.<sup>128</sup>

The third case that Marx translates involves abortion-rights. A young woman approaches a doctor, asking him to perform an abortion in order to avoid a scandal. She is pregnant with the child of her aunt's husband. She threatens to kill herself to avoid losing her honour and the problems that this would cause her family. The doctor refuses and the woman drowns herself in a stream on her family's property shortly after this. While Marx does not insert any comments into his translation of Peuchet at this point, the issue of a woman's right to choose does come up in the passage, albeit in a veiled form. The doctor describes his own concerns at the time to Peuchet: 'Although in a thousand cases, for example in difficult deliveries when the surgical choice hovers between saving the mother and saving the child, *politics or humanity decide the issue accordingly without scruple*'.<sup>129</sup> Here, Marx misses an opportunity to criticise a society that puts abstract morality above the right of individuals to make their own decisions.

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127 Marx 1999, pp. 57–8.

128 Marx 1999, p. 61.

129 Marx 1999, p. 66, emphasis added.

## Revisiting the nature/culture and man/woman dualisms

In an 1850 review-article for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung-Politisch-Ökonomische Revue* that issues a critique of Georg Friedrich Daumer's *Die Religion des neuen Weltalters* ('The Religion of the New Age'), Marx again returns to the nature/culture and man/woman dualisms, this time with Engels as a co-author. Daumer, a conservative Hegelian, was extremely critical of the 1848 revolutions and put forward his own version of a romantic naturalism. While Marx and Engels criticise a number of aspects of Daumer's work, the most significant for this study are his discussions of women and nature. For Daumer, 'Nature and woman are the really divine, as distinct from the human and man... The sacrifice of the human to the natural, of the male to the female, is the genuine, the only true meekness and self-externalization, the highest, nay, the only virtue and piety'.<sup>130</sup>

Marx and Engels – not unproblematically, however – criticise Daumer for his romantic views of women and nature, and argue that it is necessary for him to return to pure nature since he is unwilling to accept the changes that must necessarily occur in society: 'We see here that the superficiality and ignorance of the speculating founder of a religion is transformed into a very pronounced cowardice. Herr Daumer flees before the historical tragedy that is threatening him too closely to alleged nature, i.e. to a stupid rustic idyll, and preaches the cult of the female to cloak his own womanish resignation'.<sup>131</sup> While it is clear that Marx and Engels do not completely overcome the man/woman dualism with their (potentially ironic) use of 'womanish resignation', there is an important element of critique here. Marx and Engels return to their discussion of nature as socially mediated in contrast to the 'stupid rustic idyll' of Daumer's 'alleged nature'. In Daumer's abstract nature 'There is no mention... of modern natural science, which, with modern industry, has revolutionized the whole of nature and put an end to man's childish attitude towards nature as well as to other forms of childishness'.<sup>132</sup>

Just as problematic as Daumer's abstract and unmediated view of nature is his understanding of women's position:

It is the same with the cult of the female as with the cult of nature. Herr Daumer naturally does not say a word about the present social position of women; on the contrary it is a question only of the female as such. He tries to console women for their civic destitution by making them the object of a rhetorical cult which is as empty as it would fain be mysterious. Thus he

130 Daumer quoted in Marx and Engels 1975–2004b, p. 244

131 Marx and Engels 1975–2004b p. 244.

132 Marx and Engels 1975–2004b, p. 245.

seeks to comfort them by telling them that marriage puts an end to their talents through their having to take care of the children (Vol. II, p. 237), that they retain the ability to suckle babes even until the age of sixty (Vol. II, p. 251), and so on. In order to find the necessary ideal woman characters for his male devotion in his native country, he is forced to resort to various aristocratic ladies of the last century. Thus his cult of the women is reduced to the depressed attitude of a man of letters to respected patronesses.<sup>133</sup>

In the above passage, Marx returns to and further concretises his discussions of the position of women in the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *The Holy Family*. While these may have been somewhat abstract in their discussion of the need to change the position of women, in this article Marx and Engels criticise Daumer for essentialising women rather than analysing their concrete position in society. For Marx and Engels, women are potentially much more than caretakers for children, and can and should be involved in public life, a point that Marx would continue to return to throughout his life, albeit not always unproblematically.

## Conclusion

In some of his earliest work involving his critique of capitalism, Marx emphasises the dehumanised condition of women. In the 1844 *Manuscripts*, this largely takes the form of pointing out the depth of alienation in society. Humanity's alienation is so fundamental that it affects all aspects of life, including relations between men and women. No significant change can occur until all of these forms of oppression and alienation are removed. Moreover, Marx points to a dialectical relationship between nature, society and labour. In so doing, he tends to avoid privileging either nature or society, a stance that could potentially be compatible with a feminist analysis.

Later, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels provide a somewhat more empirical analysis of the origins of class-society. Within this discussion, they also address the role of the family in this process. It is not the division of labour, as such, that leads to class-society, instead it is the division between mental and manual labour that is key. Some division of labour is necessary, especially in more advanced societies. This division only becomes problematic when an unequal power-relationship develops and when a few gain power over the work of the many. At this point, work begins to lose its creative function and the alienation that is apparent within capitalist society begins to

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133. Marx and Engels 1975–2004b, pp. 245–6.

develop, although its full development can only come through the complete individuation of the individual from society. While Marx and Engels begin to theorise how this relates to women, this aspect of their work remains incomplete. It may be possible to expand this discussion to women within their theoretical framework, however.

Finally, Marx's discussions of women's oppression under capitalism in both *The Holy Family* and 'Peuchet on Suicide' point to at least a limited version of subjectivity for women. Marx certainly does not see Fleur de Marie or the women who committed suicide as completely helpless victims. For a while, Fleur de Marie was able to maintain her humanity and love for life in inhuman conditions. Additionally, the women who committed suicide were not completely lacking subjectivity. They were extremely oppressed by their families and by popular morality, but, in the end, they were able to exert a small amount of control over their lives by ending them. This is, of course, a very limited form of subjectivity, but it does illustrate that Marx does not see this as a total form of oppression: there are always options for escape. This is not a form of revolutionary subjectivity, however. At this point, Marx is unable to see woman as collective historical subjects. Their historical oppression limited their actions to individual acts of subjectivity. Later, however, this would change and Marx would begin to see women as influential subjects in history. This became especially true after the events of the Paris Commune, in which women played a significant role.

## Chapter Three

### **Political Economy, Gender, and the 'Transformation' of the Family**

While Marx's early writings on gender and the family tended to focus on the general position of women in capitalist society outside of the economic sphere, in *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*, Marx begins to integrate the discussion of gender and the family into those parts of his work that contain more explicit discussions of political economy. Within *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels discuss the process of transformation of the bourgeois family due to economic changes in society. While the bourgeois family was not completely dissolved in the conditions of capitalism, Marx and Engels saw the necessary material conditions for its dissolution. The material reality of the family, especially for the proletariat, was much different than the ideal version of the bourgeois family.

Marx also addresses this issue in *Capital*, but significantly extends his discussion. Where *The Communist Manifesto* only contains an outline of this argument, *Capital* gives a more complete account of the specifics of this process. In addition, Marx also discusses the role that women played in the struggle with capital over the length of the working-day. The addition of women into the workforce, largely due to the introduction of machinery, created both difficulties and new possibilities for the labour-movement. On the one hand, it created difficulties in the sense that women were paid less than men, and this tended to divide and weaken the movement. On the

other hand, the introduction of women in the workforce also created new possibilities for the destruction of patriarchal oppression.

I will argue that Marx did not see women's oppression as separate or secondary to the maintenance of the capitalist system. The position of women was crucial for the labour-movement, since women were directly competing with men for jobs and received significantly lower wages. Thus the two issues could not be separated from each other. Both class- and gender-oppressions must be grasped in their totality and their relation to each other for an adequate understanding of capitalism. Moreover, as I will argue, by focusing on the dialectical interaction between nature and society, as well as between production and reproduction, Marx begins to overcome these traditional dualisms, and provides some ground for a feminist understanding of these areas, albeit in a very undeveloped form.

In this chapter, I discuss four of Marx and Engels's writings: Engels's 'Principles of Communism', Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*, and Marx's *Capital*, Volumes I and III. The first of these, 'Principles of Communism' was an early draft of *The Communist Manifesto*. In it, Engels offers a short discussion of his views of the relations between public sphere and the family in a new society. This draft was consulted by Marx in the final drafting of the *Manifesto*. When this text is compared to the discussion of the dissolution of the family in the *Manifesto*, some differences between Marx and Engels on gender and the family seem to emerge. After discussing these two texts, I explore those passages in *Capital* that relate to the position of women in the labour-movement and also to the transformation of the family. Additionally, I address Marx's arguments on productive and unproductive labour, as well as his discussions of the nature/culture dualism in *Capital*.

## Engels's 'Principles of Communism' in relation to gender and the family

In 1847, Engels wrote two texts for the Communist League<sup>1</sup> in which he articulated the basic principles of communism. The second draft, 'Principles of Communism' was consulted by Marx and Engels in the process of writing *The Communist Manifesto*. Overall, the *Manifesto* tends to be slightly more nuanced and less deterministic than the much shorter 'Principles of Communism'.

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1. Founded in 1847 in London, the Communist League – largely under the leadership of Marx and Engels – sought to create an international socialist movement. It collapsed due in part to government-repression after the 1848 revolutions as well as because of internal disputes.

Engels's text, 'Principles of Communism' contains a short discussion of the family under socialism. In answering the question posed by the Communist League as to the influence that 'the communist order of society [will] have upon the family' Engels replies:

It will make the relations between the sexes a purely private affair, which concerns only the two persons involved, a relationship which is in no way the concern of society. This attitude is made possible because private property will have been abolished and the children will be educated communally. The two foundation stones of hitherto existing marriage, the dependence, based on private property, of the wife upon her husband and of the children upon the parents, thus will have been abolished. This is also the answer to the outcry made by highly moral philistines against the 'communist community of women'. Community of women is a relationship entirely peculiar to bourgeois society; it exists today in a complete form in prostitution. Prostitution is rooted in private ownership; destroy the latter and prostitution falls with it. Far from inaugurating an era of communal ownership of women, communistic organization of society in fact abolishes it.<sup>2</sup>

Here, Engels makes an argument rooted in a sort of economic determinism. The origin of the oppression of women and children by men is based solely on control of private property. Once private property is abolished, according to Engels, women would no longer be oppressed by men. Thus it would not be necessary to alter the private life of the family, because there would no longer be any reason for inequality.

This argument is problematic for at least two reasons. First, while Engels is correct to point out that economic dependence is an important variable for understanding the position of women in society, it is not the only factor. Patriarchy can exist without private property. This is evident in working-class families which have little property, and was even the case in societies with state-ownership of the means of production such as the Soviet Union and China, as well as earlier societies such as ancient Greece and Rome where private property was not yet fully developed and yet women were certainly oppressed by men.<sup>3</sup>

Second, since Engels sees private property as the only factor in women's oppression, he sees no reason to challenge the distinction between the public and private spheres. The relationship between husband and wife would remain in the private sphere. This could mean that women would remain in

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2 Engels 1971, pp. 185–6

3. For more on the position of women in ancient Greece and Rome, see Chapters Five and Six.



the home, or if the society was run more communally, a few women would remain to do the housework. But, in any case, the gender-division of labour inside the family would not change to a significant degree. Thus, because Engels only sees *economic* factors as important to understanding women's oppression, he does not see the problematic nature of the private sphere and how it has been used as a justification for maintaining many of the oppressive practices towards women such as Marx had pointed to in the 'Suicide' essay/translation. As many feminists have pointed out, the home can be a sanctuary for men primarily because of the general oppression of women. Thus, the problem is not just to abolish capitalism, but to end all oppression. Since class-society and gender-oppression existed long before capitalism, Marx argues, more is needed than just the uprooting of an economic form of oppression, private property, as important as that may be. Many other forms of oppression and domination remain from other eras and modes of production. Capitalism is able to use these in interesting ways in order to maintain its dominance. This is an issue that Marx will address in *Capital*, Volume I and will be discussed below.

### **The Communist Manifesto**

*The Communist Manifesto*, first published in 1848, is a result of Marx's substantial rewriting of Engels's 'Principles of Communism'.<sup>4</sup> This text discusses not only the economic and political changes that occurred as a result of the development of the capitalist mode of production, but also the current and future role of capitalism. First, they argue that capitalism was a relatively positive development, at least in the sense that it was able to advance production and technology to a significant extent: 'In scarcely one hundred years of class rule the bourgeoisie has created more massive and more colossal forces of production than have all preceding generations put together. The harnessing of natural forces, machinery, the application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steamships, railways, the telegraph, clearance of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured up from the ground – what earlier century foresaw that such productive powers slumbered in the bosom of social labour'.<sup>5</sup> Thus capitalism has helped to create conditions in which humanity has gained much greater control over nature.

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4. In fact, Marx rewrote the whole thing, using the 'Principles' only as background. Thus, although Engels's name is listed as an author, his contribution to the final version was minimal. Marx and Engels 1975–2004c, pp. 697–8.

5. Marx and Engels 1996, pp. 5–6.

Furthermore, the bourgeoisie has had a significant effect on social relations in society through the abolition of feudal relations and the creation of new modes of social organisation.<sup>6</sup> This has been true not only in the domestic sphere, but also internationally, where trade has to some extent united the world, at least in terms of creating universal commerce:

Through the exploitation of the world market the bourgeoisie has made the production and consumption of all countries cosmopolitan. It has pulled the national basis of industry right out from under the reactionaries, to their consternation. Long-established national industries have been destroyed and are still being destroyed daily. They are being displaced by new industries – the introduction of which becomes a life-and-death question for all civilized nations – industries that no longer work up indigenous raw materials but use raw materials from the ends of the earth, industries whose products are consumed not only in the country of origin but in every part of the world. In place of the old needs satisfied by home production we have new ones which demand the products of the most distant lands and climes for their satisfaction. In place of the old local and national self-sufficiency and isolation we have a universal commerce, a universal dependence of nations on one another. As in the production of material things, so also with intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common currency. National partiality and narrowness become more and more impossible, and from the many national and local literatures a world literature arises.<sup>7</sup>

While, in the early stages of capitalism, these changes represented a progressive force, later the capitalist mode of production becomes a fetter to the further development of society.<sup>8</sup> Capitalism not only creates crisis because 'there is too much civilization, too many goods, too much industry, too much commerce';<sup>9</sup> it also creates new subjective forces that will eventually overthrow the system: 'The weapons used by the bourgeoisie to strike down feudalism are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. But the bourgeoisie has not only forged the weapons which bring it death; it has also produced the men who will wield these weapons – modern workers, *proletarians*'.<sup>10</sup> The conditions of production themselves help to create a consciousness for the

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6. Marx and Engels 1996, p. 3.

7. Marx and Engels 1996, pp. 4–5.

8. Marx and Engels 1996, pp. 6–7.

9. Marx and Engels 1996, p. 6.

10. Marx and Engels 1996, p. 7.

worker, which leads to the establishment of 'coalitions against the bourgeois' where they engage in a variety of struggles against capital.<sup>11</sup>

The end-result of this struggle will be a society that is much different from capitalist society: 'In place of the old bourgeois society with its classes and class conflicts there will be an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.<sup>12</sup> But this is only possible with a total revolution: 'The proletariat, the lowest stratum of present-day society, cannot lift itself up, cannot raise itself up, without flinging into the air the whole superstructure of social strata which form the establishment'.<sup>13</sup> Thus, more is needed than just to overthrow the capitalist economic system: all elements of society must be changed, including the family.

### *Gender and the family in 'The Communist Manifesto'*

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels also briefly address the issue of the position of women in society and discuss the possibilities for the transformation of the family. While there are some similarities to Engels's 'Principles of Communism', Marx and Engels's argument here is slightly more nuanced. Their focus is still on economic changes and their relation to the family, but the discussion is less determinist. They discuss the major trends that are occurring, but to some extent leave open the possibility that something more than economic change is necessary to uproot the bourgeois family.

Capital has created conditions for the exploitation of all labour through the development of modern machines:

As manual work requires fewer skills and less exertion, that is, the more modern industry has developed, so the labour of men is more and more displaced by that of women. Differences of age and sex have no social validity any more for the working class. They are merely instruments of labour which cost more or less according to age and sex.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, capitalism takes women and children out of the domestic sphere and makes them available as workers, often to do what was traditionally conceived of as men's work. This is in large part due to the fact that less strength is required to operate machinery than to do work with tools. The work done by women and children produces the same value as men, but as Marx and Engels note, it is not paid at the same value. While they do not point to the

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11 Marx and Engels 1996, p. 9.

12 Marx and Engels 1996, p. 20.

13 Marx and Engels 1996, p. 11.

14 Marx and Engels 1996, p. 8.

reasons why women and children are paid less, they do notice that these groups are treated differently from adult-male workers. This is an issue that Marx addresses further in *Capital*, however.

In addition to women and children entering the workforce, Marx and Engels discuss how the family is in the process of being abolished in its bourgeois form:

The circumstances necessary for the old society to exist are already abolished in the circumstances of the proletariat. The proletarian is without property; his relationship to his wife and children no longer has anything in common with bourgeois family relations; modern industrial labour, modern servitude to capital, which is the same in England as in France or America as in Germany, has stripped him of all national characteristics. The law, morality, religion, are for him so many bourgeois prejudices that hide just as many bourgeois interests.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly to Engels's discussion of the economic nature of the abolition of the bourgeois family, here Marx and Engels point to the absence of property for the proletarian man as a source of the dissolution of the family. This is not the only source of the dissolution of the family, however. There is an ideological element as well.

As capitalism develops, the dominant ideology of bourgeois society becomes less and less believable. This is especially true in the case of the family. 'The bourgeoisie has torn the pathetic veil of sentiment from family relations and reduced them to purely monetary ones'.<sup>16</sup> Thus, it is the ideology of the bourgeois family that is being abolished by the material conditions in society which become based more and more on commodity and monetary relations.

Marx and Engels continue their discussion of the transformation of the family:

Transformation [*Aufhebung*]<sup>17</sup> of the family! Even the most radical of the radicals flares up at this infamous proposal of the communists.

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15. Marx and Engels 1996, p. 11.

16. Marx and Engels 1996, p. 4.

17. There has been a great deal of difficulty in translating this German word into English since there is no commonly used English equivalent for the term. While it has been commonly translated as 'abolition', (Marx and Engels 1975–2004c, p. 501) 'transformation', (Carver's translation in Marx and Engels 1996, p. 16) and as 'the destruction of domestic ties' in Macfarlane's early translation (Black 2004, p. 155), these only get at part of the implied meaning of both clearing-away and preserving, as discussed in the previous chapter. In the above passage, Marx seems to posit a double movement, in which the oppressive aspects of the family are dissolved but the positive elements are incorporated into a new type of family-structure.

What is the basis of the contemporary bourgeois family? Capital and private gain. It is completely developed only for the bourgeoisie; but it finds its complement in the enforced dissolution of the family among the proletarians and in public prostitution.

The bourgeois family naturally declines with the decline of its complement, and the two disappear with the disappearance of capital.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Marx and Engels point to the possibility for change that is present in the capitalist system at the time that they were writing. At this time, some of the most significant material elements of the patriarchal family as it emerged from feudalism were disappearing. The most significant of these was the control that the father exercised over all members of the family due to the nature of the economic relations of the family. While, in previous periods, the father had sole control of what was produced in the household, and thus gained significant control over all aspects of his family's life, capitalism, by taking production out of the domestic sphere, created conditions that had the potential to undermine the man's power over the women and children in the house.

Marx and Engels point again to the gap between the idealised relations of the bourgeois family and their material reality. The material basis of the bourgeois family is private gain, and this is becoming the case even for the proletarians, since all members of the family who are able to work must do so to support the family: 'Bourgeois phrases about the family and child-rearing, about the deeply felt relationship of parent to child, become even more revolting when all proletarian family ties are severed as a consequence of large-scale industry, and children are simply transformed into articles of trade and instruments of labour'.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, while they hold that the bourgeois family will dissolve with the dissolution of the capitalist mode of production, at this point, they do not describe what will take its place, nor do they describe how this process will occur.

Finally, similarly in some ways to Marx's discussion in the 1844 *Manuscripts* of a form of vulgar communism that seeks only to negate private property in the narrowest sense, Marx and Engels criticise the bourgeois charge that the communists would introduce a 'community of women':

But you communists want to introduce common access to women, protests the whole bourgeoisie in chorus.

The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instruments of production are to be utilized in common and

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18 Marx and Engels 1996, p. 16.

19 Marx and Engels 1996, p. 17.

naturally cannot think otherwise than that common use is equally applicable to women.

He does not suspect that *the point here is to transform the status of women as mere instruments of production.*<sup>20</sup>

Here, Marx and Engels argue that bourgeois men see women only as commodities, and therefore think that women will become the property of all men under communism. Capitalist social relations turn everything, including labour-power into a commodity. Just as the goal of a socialist revolution is to abolish the exploitation and alienation of the (male) worker, the same is also true for women as well. A total social revolution of the type that they are calling for would raise the status of all members of society.

Furthermore, they clarify Engels's earlier position on the existence of the 'community of women' under bourgeois society. While Engels argues in 'Principles of Communism' that private property is the key to understanding the community of women, here Marx and Engels make a slightly more nuanced argument:

Bourgeois marriage is really the community of married women. At the very most the communists might be reproached for wanting to replace a hidden community of women with a sanctioned, openly avowed community of women. In any case it is self-evident that with the transformation of the *current relations of production*, the community of women emerging from those relations, i.e. sanctioned and unsanctioned prostitution, will disappear.<sup>21</sup>

In this passage, Marx and Engels point to the change in the 'current relations of production' as the factor that would lead to the end of 'sanctioned and unsanctioned prostitution'. This is a significantly different argument from Engels's earlier one to the effect that the abolition of private property would put an end to prostitution. The 'relations of production' include more than just private property. Instead, these are constituted by all of the social relations involved in production, including the lower wages that women receive and the form that the family takes. This is not meant to imply an economic-determinist framework. Instead, Marx viewed the mode of production as important in the sense that it conditions other social relations, but it does not determine them. Economic factors, as well as other social relations, are seen as mutually interacting and not causally related, although Marx does give greater emphasis to economic relations.<sup>22</sup>

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20 Ibid, emphasis added.

21 Ibid, emphasis added.

22 Ollman 2003, pp. 120–1.

## Nature and society in *Capital*

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Marx's theory on the relationship between nature and society is more complex than most scholars have allowed for. At least in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, Marx put forward a view of humanity in which nature was dialectically related to it, rather than one in which humanity increasingly came to dominate more and more aspects of nature until complete domination could occur under socialism. While the 1844 *Manuscripts* provide a relatively clear statement on the reciprocal relationship between humanity and nature, other parts of Marx's work are, perhaps, not as clear. This is especially true with regard to *Capital*, as a number of scholars have argued that Marx changed his position on the issue in favour of an approach that would allow humanity to transcend nature and necessity.

Two of the most significant scholars to make this argument are Alfred Schmidt and Christine Di Stefano.<sup>23</sup> Schmidt argues that, while Marx's early work pointed to an idealistic 'resurrection' of nature, his later work moved away from this conception:

In later life he no longer wrote of a 'resurrection' of the whole of nature. The new society is to benefit man alone, and there is no doubt that this is to be at the expense of external nature. Nature is to be mastered with gigantic technological aids, and the smallest possible expenditure of time and labour. It is to serve all men as the material substratum for all conceivable consumption of goods.<sup>24</sup>

Here, Schmidt argues that Marx returned to a dualistic view of the relationship between humanity and nature where humanity could, through technical means, dominate nature to a certain extent. This would force nature to serve all human needs, without the potential for nature to reassert itself: 'The exploitation of nature will not cease in the future, but man's encroachments into nature will be rationalized, so that their remoter consequences will remain capable of control. In this way, nature will be robbed step by step of the possibility of revenging itself on men for their victories over it'.<sup>25</sup>

This process is somewhat limited, however, since humanity can never fully transcend necessity. In a comparison of Marx and Engels on this question, Schmidt writes:

Marx, however, was both more skeptical and more dialectical in seeing that the realm of freedom does not simply replace that of necessity, but retains

23. See Schmidt 1971 and Di Stefano 1991b.

24. Schmidt 1971, p. 155.

25. Schmidt 1971, pp. 155–6.

it as an inextinguishable internal moment. A more rational organization of the economy can certainly limit the labour-time necessary for the reproduction of life, but can never wholly abolish labour. This reflects the dialectical duality of Marxist materialism. It is capable of being transcended in non-transcendence. Marx reconciled freedom and necessity on the basis of necessity.<sup>26</sup>

Humanity must always interact with nature in order to survive. However, this becomes easier as science and technology advance. Therefore, less time is needed to fulfil the most basic requirements of life. This leaves more time for activity not directly related to the immediate reproduction of life. Thus, necessity is sublated, not transcended.

While Schmidt excellently argues the case that labour, and thus humanity's relation to nature, can never be fully transcended, his argument on society's relation to nature in a post-capitalist society is problematic. It is not clear that Marx separated nature and society in the way that Schmidt describes: I would argue that such a separation does not appear in *Capital*.

Di Stefano makes a similar argument to that of Schmidt,<sup>27</sup> however, she is much more critical of what she sees as Marx's attempts to transcend nature and necessity. In her discussion of what she sees as Marx's views on a post-capitalist society, she writes:

Certainly it is a world that has moved 'beyond' the heretofore essential dialectical moment. It is a world in which 'humanity' stands over nature; in which 'the proletariat' stands in for humanity, and finally, in which the embodied figure of the universal laborer comes to resemble the action of the commodity form under which he was previously oppressed. That is, 'he' must deny that which he requires: female reproductive labor and its connotative relatives, nature and necessity.<sup>28</sup>

Thus Di Stefano seems to be arguing that Marx places an abstract version of humanity – the (male) proletariat – at the centre of his theory. In this reading, it is the proletariat that will create a universal society that everyone will benefit from once nature has been overcome. This, however, is a false universal, since it leaves out female reproductive labour, nature and necessity. This argument will be addressed in the following section, with regard to Marx's views on the relationship between humanity, labour and nature.

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26. Schmidt 1971, pp. 135–6.

27. Di Stefano 1991b.

28. Di Stefano 1991b, p. 119.



### *Nature and the labour-process*

As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, Marx's concept of labour involves a dialectical relation between humanity and nature. While human-beings appropriate nature and adapt it to their own needs, this process does not necessarily have to involve a relationship of domination:

He makes use of the mechanical, physical and chemical properties of some substances in order to set them to work on other substances as instruments of his power, and in accordance with his purposes. . . . Thus nature becomes one of the organs of his activity, which he annexes to his own bodily organs, adding stature to himself in spite of the Bible. As the earth is his original larder, so too it is his original tool house.<sup>29</sup>

This passage from *Capital* is strikingly similar to statements made in the 1844 *Manuscripts* where he argues that nature is the 'inorganic body of man [mensch]'.<sup>30</sup> In the labour-process, at least in its unalienated non-capitalist form, there can be moments of unity between humanity and nature. There is no unbridgeable gulf between the two.

Moreover, there is an important social element involved in the relationship between humanity and nature:

With the exception of the extractive industries, such as mining, hunting, fishing (and agriculture, but only in so far as it starts by breaking up virgin soil), where the material for labour is provided directly by nature, all branches of industry deal with raw material, i.e. an object of labour which has already been filtered through labour, which is itself already a product of labour. An example is seed in agriculture. Animals and plants which we are accustomed to consider as products of nature, may be, in their present form, not only products of, say, last year's labour, but the result of a gradual transformation continued through many generations under human control, and through the agency of human labour. As regards the instruments of labour in particular, they show traces of the labour of past ages, even to the most superficial observer, in the great majority of cases.<sup>31</sup>

Here, Marx appears to be arguing that the concept of nature as separate from society is itself an incorrect abstraction. Even the seeds used for agriculture and domesticated animals cannot be seen as pure products of nature: rather, they are elements of a socially-based transformation of nature. Previous

29. Marx 1976, p. 285.

30. Marx 2004, p. 83.

31. Marx 1976, pp. 287–8.

labour and knowledge was necessary to even get to the point where agricultural production itself could occur. This fact is glossed over, if nature is only viewed as something external to human society.

This appears to call into question the notion of the nature/culture dualism. If both are dialectically related and cannot be separated in practice, then such a theory has the potential of moving beyond dualistic thinking in this regard. Moreover, while Marx did not directly challenge the corresponding man/woman dualism, the same logic could potentially be applied.

### *Necessity and freedom*

While Marx did not often discuss his vision of socialism, there is an important passage in *Capital*, Volume III that deals with the relationship between nature and necessity in a socialist society:

The real wealth of society and the possibility of a constant expansion of its reproduction process does not depend on the length of surplus labour but rather on its productivity and on the more or less plentiful conditions of production in which it is performed. The realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his needs, to maintain and reproduce his life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all forms of society and under all possible modes of production. This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis. The reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite.<sup>32</sup>

Here, Marx is pointing to the dialectical nature of the relationship between freedom and necessity. Contrary to Di Stefano's claims that he sought to transcend nature and necessity in favour of a realm of almost complete freedom,<sup>33</sup> freedom and necessity are essential moments in the dialectic of humanity

32. Marx 1991, pp. 958–9.

33. Di Stefano 1991b, p. 124.

and nature. Where Marx states that the realm of freedom 'lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper', he does not mean to imply that freedom and necessity are mutually opposed. Instead, necessity is something that will always exist.

What will change under socialism, however, is that production for the sake of production will no longer be the driving force in society. Instead, the goal of society will be 'the development of human powers as an end in itself'. Thus, the primary emphasis is on the potential of individuals to express both their individuality and their species being through their labour.

This does not imply a transcendence of nature, however. Labour will always exist, since it is vital for the human being to interact with nature for survival. 'The labour process, as we have just presented it in its simple and abstract elements, is purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values. It is an appropriation of what exists in nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live'.<sup>34</sup>

As Schmidt shows: 'He [Marx] did not mean to limit truly human labour to the "development of human powers" as an end in itself over and above practical labour. In all labour which is no longer alienated, man succeeds in really returning into himself out of the estrangement of his own essential powers, and in making himself at home in the external world transformed by those powers'.<sup>35</sup> For Marx, any type of labour, assuming that it takes place under non-alienated conditions, can lead to moments of identity with nature. Therefore, there appears to be no need, in Marx, to transcend nature and necessity. Instead, the ways in which human-beings think and interact with nature need to be altered. Here, again, within Marx's dialectical framework, identity and difference can coexist without one side dominating the other. Theoretically, this could be applied to the man/woman dualism that Marx began to address in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, even if he never fully articulated this position.

## The political economy of *Capital*, Volume I

### *The dual nature of labour and commodities*

Marx begins his discussion in *Capital* with the commodity and its dual nature. It contains two forms of value, use-value and exchange-value. Its use-value

<sup>34</sup> Marx 1976, p. 290.

<sup>35</sup> Schmidt 1971, p. 143.

is a qualitative measure and is 'only realized in use or in consumption'.<sup>36</sup> The second form of value, exchange-value, is a quantitative measure and is an abstraction from its use-value. It is used to compare and exchange equal use-values for one another.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, since exchange-value is only an abstraction, it can only be 'the mode of expression, the "form of appearance", of a content distinguishable from it'.<sup>38</sup> Thus, exchange-value is not a property inherent within the object: instead, it is something that is socially-constructed under specific social circumstances.

If the commodity has this dual nature, then according to Marx, this must be because of the nature of labour itself:

It [the commodity] could not have this two-fold nature as a product of labor if the *labor itself* did not have that character. The commodity in embryo contains all the contradictions of capitalism precisely because of the contradictory nature of labor. That is the key to *all* contradiction.<sup>39</sup>

Thus labour itself has a two-fold nature as well. It contains both concrete and abstract labour. The concrete is that specific form of labour in which use-values are produced. Abstract labour, on the other hand, is that part of labour that is much more general. It is a quantitative measure of the average time needed to perform a task.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, this is a concept that is specific to capitalism: 'The value-form of the product of labour is the most abstract, but also the most universal form of the bourgeois mode of production; by that fact it stamps the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social production of a historical and transitory character. If then we make the mistake of treating it as the eternal natural form of social production, we necessarily overlook the specificity of the value-form, and consequently of the commodity-form together with its further developments, the money form, the capital form, etc.'<sup>41</sup>

### *Feminist critiques of Marx on production and reproduction*

In a number of cases, feminist theorists have criticised Marx and Marxism for its focus on production at the expense of consumption and reproduction, which have traditionally been women's tasks. According to Jaggar and Hartmann, as well as many other feminist scholars, this division of

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36 Marx 1976, p. 126.

37 Ibid.

38 Marx 1976, p. 127.

39 Dunayevskaya 2000, p. 85.

40 Marx 1976, p. 137.

41 Marx 1976, p. 174.

production and consumption tends to mirror the division between traditionally men's and women's work – something they argue that Marx does not take into account because his theory is gender-blind.<sup>42</sup> Jaggar argues that Marxist theory has separated production and consumption to such an extent that Marxists 'define even the nonprocreative part of women's household work not only as being outside the market, but as being outside production altogether'.<sup>43</sup>

Jaggar also sees this view as problematic because it not only sharply distinguishes between the two, but also places production above consumption and reproduction: 'Although there is reciprocal interaction between production and consumption, however, production ultimately determines consumption'.<sup>44</sup> Thus, it is only necessary to look closely at production and its effects on consumption rather than investigating more closely the reciprocal interaction between the two in this reading of Marx. This, according to Jaggar, 'deprives Marxism of the conceptual resources necessary to understanding women's oppression. Indeed, it actually obscures that oppression and so contributes to maintaining it'.<sup>45</sup>

Nicholson makes a similar argument to that of Jaggar. She also concludes that Marx's theory focuses primarily on a very narrow aspect of production: 'In effect, Marx has eliminated from his theoretical focus all activities basic to human survival which fall outside of a capitalist "economy." Those activities he has eliminated include not only those identified by feminists as "reproductive" (childcare, nursing) but also those concerned with social organization, i.e. those regulating kinship relations or in modern societies those we would classify as "political"'.<sup>46</sup> According to Nicholson, Marx posited production in the capitalist sense as the most important factor in understanding all societies, at the expense of other categories such as kinship and politics.

Nicholson views this as problematic since economic categories only become primary under capitalism. Therefore, Marx incorrectly projects capitalistic values rather than resisting them: 'While all societies have some means of organizing the production of food and objects as well as some means of organizing sexuality and childcare, it is only in capitalist society that the former set of activities becomes differentiated from the latter under the concept of the "economic" and takes on a certain priority. Thus by employing the more specific meaning of "economic" in his cross-cultural claims, Marx projects the

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42 See Jaggar 1983 and Hartmann 1997

43 Jaggar 1983, p. 75.

44 Jaggar 1983, p. 74.

45 Ibid

46 Nicholson 1987, p. 18.

separation and primacy of the “economic” found in capitalist society onto all human societies’.<sup>47</sup> However, as I will argue below, Marx’s discussion of production, reproduction, consumption, productive labour, and unproductive labour are more than economic categories in the sense used by classical political economists. Rather, Marx criticises these views as one-sided and ahistorical.

Di Stefano argues that Marxist theory fails ‘to acknowledge the modern figure of the laboring mother and the historical and social significance of reproductive and caring labor’.<sup>48</sup> Marx and Marxists give primary emphasis to a very narrow type of ‘productive’ labour that involves only typically-male labour, or at least ignores women’s particular labour.<sup>49</sup>

A number of Marxist feminists have taken aspects of Marx’s understanding of political economy and applied feminist insights in order to deal with the issue of traditional women’s labour. Two areas of inquiry are especially important in this regard – the domestic-labour debate and discussions of the reproductive sphere. The domestic-labour debate began with Margaret Benston’s 1969 article, ‘The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation’. In this seminal article, Benston argues that women can be largely viewed as a separate class of workers, since their work tends to be very different from men’s. Women’s work in the home is precapitalist, at least in the sense that it produces only use-value and not exchange-value.<sup>50</sup> Household-labour and childcare are socially-necessary forms of labour, but since they are not based on commodity-production, they are viewed as less valuable under capitalism.<sup>51</sup> Because this work is socially important, but unvalued in the capitalist sense, Benston argues that it is necessary to bring women’s work into the public sphere, such that it will be valued in the same way as other labour in the public sphere.<sup>52</sup> She argues that ‘when such work is moved into the public sector, then the material basis for discrimination against women will be gone’.<sup>53</sup>

Later, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James took this argument even further, claiming that ‘domestic work produces not merely use-values, but is essential to the production of surplus-value’.<sup>54</sup> Women’s labour is productive

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47 Nicholson 1987, p. 19

48 Di Stefano 1991b, pp. 122–3.

49 Di Stefano 1991b, p. 123.

50 Benston 1969, p. 15.

51 Ibid.

52 Benston 1969, p. 21.

53 Benston 1969, p. 22.

54 Dalla Costa and James 1971, p. 16. This and similar work led to the development of movements, particularly in Italy and other European states, for wages for housework. For an example of this type of argument, see Federici 1975.

in the sense that their labour frees men from domestic responsibilities and allows them to focus on work in the public sphere for the benefit of the capitalist.<sup>55</sup> This is particularly the case because 'they carry out domestic labor *without a wage and without going on strike*, but also they always receive back into the home all those who are periodically expelled from their jobs by economic crisis. The family, this maternal cradle always ready to help and protect in time of need, has been in fact the best guarantee that the unemployed do not immediately become a horde of disruptive outsiders'.<sup>56</sup> Thus, women's work allows the capitalist system to function more smoothly because it limits resistance and labour-unrest.

Wally Secombe has developed a critique of the idea that domestic labour is productive in the capitalist sense. It does not provide surplus-value, since it is not exchanged in the marketplace. However, it does produce some form of value, since labour-power itself has value. Thus, domestic labour has its own unique contradiction, both unproductive in the capitalist sense but, at the same time, providing a social use-value.<sup>57</sup>

The second topic that many Marxist feminists addressed in the period from the late 1960s until the 1980s was the issue of reproduction in the private sphere. Largely unhappy with the economistic focus of these earlier pieces and dual-systems theory, Lise Vogel sought to expand beyond the focus on domestic labour without positing separate spheres. The theory of separate spheres is something that, she argues, can be traced back to Engels's *Origin of the Family*, where he argued: 'According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This again is of a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence... on the other side, the production of human beings themselves'.<sup>58</sup> Thus, for Engels and many later Marxists, there are two separate spheres: one that deals with public production, and the other private reproduction. These spheres certainly do interact, but they are analytically distinct, according to this model.

Arguing for a theory that is better-able to account for the interaction between the two spheres, Vogel puts forward her concept of 'social reproduction', stemming from Marx, Lenin and Clara Zetkin. In this theoretical formation, women have a very different position to men because of their unique role in social reproduction due to child-bearing and child-rearing activities. While this is somewhat biologically conditioned, these women's roles are also

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55 Dalla Costa and James 1971, p. 17

56 Dalla Costa and James 1971, p. 18

57 Secombe 1974, p. 12

58. Quoted in Vogel 1983, p. 31.

socially conditioned by a contradiction present in all class-societies: the contradiction between exploitation of the current labour-force and reproduction of the next generation. Because of women's biological role in reproduction, they tend to be less efficient workers and thus tend to stay in the domestic realm.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Vogel begins to broaden our understanding of the political economy of social reproduction.

While Di Stefano, Marxist feminists and others are correct to point out that Marx, and especially a number of other Marxists, have failed to systematically discuss traditional women's labour, it may be time to reopen this and other debates concerning Marx and feminism. I will argue that Di Stefano, Marxist feminists and others miss some of the nuance in Marx's definition of productive labour. A few scholars, such as Chattopadhyay, offer a basis to do so,<sup>60</sup> as does engaging in a close reading of Marx's discussions of reproduction. The debate over the place of traditional women's work in Marx's theory revolves primarily around two issues. The first primarily deals with how Marx demarcates the spheres of production and reproduction, and the second involves Marx's use of the term 'productive labour'. In the following sections, I turn to these two debates and argue that, while Marx's theory remains underdeveloped in terms of providing an account that includes gender as important to understanding capitalism – Marx never addresses women's domestic labour directly – his categories nonetheless lead in the direction of a systematic critique of patriarchy as it manifests itself in capitalism. In this sense, his categories provide resources for feminist theory, or, at least, areas for new dialogue at a time when Marx's critique of capital is coming to the fore once again.

### *Production, consumption and reproduction in capitalism*

I would suggest that, along with Marx's critique of traditional accounts of 'productive labour' under capitalism, his discussion of capitalist reproduction and consumption could offer a starting point, albeit in a very undeveloped form, for understanding the specifically capitalist nature of patriarchy. Let us trace these points in *Capital*. In his chapter on 'Simple Reproduction', as well as some material from earlier drafts of *Capital*, Marx begins to strip away the distorted nature of classical-political economy's understanding of capitalist production. This includes an insightful critique of their understanding of the relationship between production and consumption.

In this sense, Marx describes the view of classical-political economists who see production and consumption in a one-sided and distorted way.

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59 Vogel 1983.

60. Chattopadhyay 1999.



Classical-political economy views the relationship between production and consumption as largely mutually-exclusive. Products are consumed either for productive or unproductive purposes: 'Hence both the capitalist and his ideologist, the political economist, consider only that part of the worker's individual consumption to be productive which is required for the perpetuation of the working class, and which therefore must take place in order that the capitalist may have labour-power to consume. What the worker consumes over and above that minimum for his own pleasure is seen as unproductive consumption'.<sup>61</sup> Consumption is important only to the extent that the consumption of the working class must be kept to a subsistence-level in order to produce the maximum-amount of surplus-value.

Furthermore, Marx illustrates the alienated nature of this process in which production and consumption are fragmented for the worker:

The worker's productive consumption and his individual consumption are therefore totally distinct. In the former, he acts as the motive power of capital, and belongs to the capitalist. In the latter, he belongs to himself, and performs his necessary vital functions outside the production process. The result of the first kind of consumption is that the capitalist continues to live, of the second, that the worker himself continues to live.<sup>62</sup>

Here, Marx begins to get at the origins of the public/private distinction as it exists in capitalism. The production of goods for the purposes of producing surplus-value is seen as completely separate from the consumption necessary for maintaining the health of the worker.

This, however, is only a one-sided assessment of the process. Consumption is integral to production, although capitalist social relations tend to conceal this:

It is the production and reproduction of the capitalist's most indispensable means of production: the worker. The individual consumption of the worker, whether it occurs inside or outside the workshop, inside or outside the labour process, remains an aspect of the production and reproduction of capital, just as the cleaning of machinery does, whether it is done during the labour process, or when intervals in that process permit. The fact that the worker performs acts of individual consumption in his own interest, and not to please the capitalist, is something entirely irrelevant to the matter.... The maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker's drives for self-preservation and propagation. All the

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61. Marx 1976, p. 718.

62. Marx 1976, p. 717.

capitalist cares for is to reduce the worker's individual consumption to the necessary minimum.<sup>63</sup>

While Marx states that 'the capitalist may safely leave this [daily reproduction] to the worker's drives for self-preservation and propagation', this is not an attempt to treat 'reproductive activity [only]... as a reflex of biological and economic forces' as Benenson argues.<sup>64</sup> Marx is, rather, describing the viewpoint of the capitalist who only sees the production of things – including the worker's labour-power – as important. This seems to be an automatic process for the capitalist because this form of consumption occurs outside of his primary focus – production.

This viewpoint is one-sided, however, since there are social elements in this process as well:

Man is distinguished from all other animals by the limitless and flexible nature of his needs. But it is equally true that no animal is able to restrict his needs to the same unbelievable degree and to reduce the conditions of his life to the absolute minimum. In a word, there is no animal with the same talent for 'Irishung' himself.<sup>65</sup>

This 'talent' for reducing the workers' consumption to an 'absolute minimum' is part of what makes human labour so valuable to the capitalist. But a serious contradiction develops when the cost of labour is driven below the level necessary for maintenance of the working class. At this point, capital's drive to reduce the cost of buying labour-power comes up against a natural obstacle and must find other means of increasing the value of the worker's labour.

While he seems to emphasise to some extent the importance of this 'natural' minimum, as was the case in his earlier works, Marx is not only referring to a biological minimum. There are a number of other factors involved as well. This will vary based upon the society in question and the level of development that that society has reached: 'The *exchange-value* of labour-power is paid for when the price paid is that of the means of subsistence that is customarily held to be essential in a given state of society to enable the worker to exert his labour-power with the necessary degree of strength, health, vitality, etc. and to perpetuate himself by producing replacements for himself'.<sup>66</sup> Thus, in one case, this wage will generally need to be equal to the means of subsistence of the worker and his family, while, in a different case where women

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63. Marx 1976, p. 718.

64. Benenson 1984, p. 14.

65. Marx 1976, p. 1068.

66. Marx 1976, p. 1067.

and children are part of the workforce, the means of subsistence for a worker would be much less.<sup>67</sup>

In contrast to the political economists that Marx criticises for their one-sided focus on production, Marx sees production and reproduction as a dialectically-related whole: 'The capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total, connected process, i.e. a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer'.<sup>68</sup> When viewed 'as a total, connected process', reproduction involves more than just the creation of human-beings as such. Instead, under capitalism, reproduction involves a social aspect as well that continually 'reproduces the capital-relation itself' – the worker and the capitalist. Thus production and reproduction are not mutually-opposed: instead, all elements necessary to capitalist production, including childrearing, are dialectical moments of the whole.

Marx continues with his discussion of capitalist reproduction, arguing that this process is not limited to the factory and production proper, but also has an effect on what is seen as the private sphere:

The *process of accumulation* is itself an intrinsic feature of the capitalist process of production. It entails the *new creation of wage-labourers*, of the means to realize and increase the available amount of capital. It does this either by extending its rule to sections of the population not previously subject to itself, such as women or children; or else it subjugates a section of the labouring masses that has accrued through the natural growth of the population. On closer inspection it becomes evident that capital itself *regulates* this production of labour-power, the production of the mass of men it intends to exploit in accordance with its own needs.<sup>69</sup>

Here, Marx notes the way in which reproduction, both physically and socially, is a necessary feature of the capitalist accumulation-process. Capital is the subject that increasingly comes to regulate all activity and comes to dominate new groups, including women and children. It does this 'in accordance with its own needs', rather than the needs of those of society.

Certainly, in these passages, Marx is primarily referring to the reproduction of the capitalist social system, and not necessarily to the relations of human

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<sup>67</sup> This argument will be discussed in more detail below with regard to Marx's position on the family-wage. Moreover, Marx discusses in detail how this minimum-subsistence was consistently lowered in terms of the quantity, and especially the quality, of food and housing. For this argument see Marx 1976, pp. 802–70.

<sup>68</sup> Marx 1976, p. 724.

<sup>69</sup> Marx 1976, p. 1061.

reproduction. Moreover, Marx himself was probably not all that interested in understanding these relationships in the private sphere; however, he does potentially provide an analytical tool for understanding how these two separate forms of reproduction interact. At least indirectly, Marx points out that human-beings are never reproduced only as *biological* beings as such. Instead, they are reproduced under very specific conditions, based upon a number of material relationships within a particular society. In our own society, children are born, raised and educated in the context of a capitalist society, where they are expected to behave in certain ways once they enter the workforce. Therefore, while Marx certainly never reached this point of theoretical specificity regarding the relations involved in human reproduction, his arguments on the social reproduction of capitalist relations seem to point towards a need to understand the social relations within both the public and private spheres, as well as the interaction between the two, in order to gain an adequate understanding of the true functioning of the capitalist system. No real understanding of social relationships in the family involving human reproduction could be understood outside of its placement within the capitalist mode of production.

While Marx clearly sees production as a primary determinant of the structure of the family and society as a whole, here he is only speaking of the capitalist mode of production, in which society has largely ceded its control of social relations to the dictates of the market. This is only an appearance, however: 'If production has a capitalist form, so too will reproduction. Just as in the capitalist mode of production the labour process *appears* only as a means towards the process of valorization, so in the case of reproduction it *appears* only as a means of reproducing the value advanced as capital, i.e. as self-valorizing value'.<sup>70</sup> Here, Marx seems to be using appearance in a dialectical way, in which the appearance is only a part of the whole. In this case, the way that production occurs today is not the only possible organisation of production. Even under capitalism, where labour seems to be only 'a means towards the process of valorization', there is much more going on than that. Just as capitalism is reproducing itself and extending its relations to all areas, including the family, it is also developing the means to transcend this form.<sup>71</sup> While, at this point, he does not discuss this issue with regard to the family, as we will see later in this chapter, to some extent Marx does also apply this logic to the form of the family, arguing that it is unlikely that the modern Western family would be the final form that it takes.

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<sup>70</sup> Marx 1976, p. 711, emphasis added.

<sup>71</sup> Marx 1976, p. 621.

Marx's concept of reproduction is more complex than most accounts allow for. It is true that Marx, at least to some extent, ignores childbirth and some of the social practices surrounding it. Marx was primarily interested in understanding and transforming the specifically-capitalist social system in which he lived. Through careful and systematic analysis, Marx argued that production was a primary determinant of all aspects of social life, and especially so under capitalism, where fetishised relations involving commodities tend to dominate over relations with real individuals.

For this reason, Marx saw it as necessary to focus primarily on production in the public sphere, as well as those aspects of the private sphere that directly relate to production proper. This does not mean that Marx completely ignored the private sphere and relegated it completely to the ahistorical 'natural'. Instead, he argued that the private sphere could only be understood with reference to production. Moreover, if the two spheres really do interact to a significant extent, then the same would also be true of production itself: production could only be truly understood once the specific relations involved in human reproduction were understood. This does extrapolate a bit from what Marx was actually arguing, but tends to mesh with the general trends of Marx's thinking: the relations of production may have had analytical priority over other relations; however, these relations must be understood as dialectically related to the whole in order to understand the capitalist, or any other mode of production. Marx's lack of interest in human reproduction should not deter us from exploring these issues within his own framework.

Marx focused on the specific ways in which capitalism reproduced itself through socialisation of labour. For Marx, an understanding of any social phenomena could only take place within the context of a specific mode of production and a corresponding social system. Thus, the social elements involved in reproduction, for Marx, contain more than just species-reproduction, and must be integrated into a whole system that includes both production of goods and people as well as their reproduction. Since they are a dialectically-integrated whole, where, for example, reproduction is a dialectical moment of production, this avoids many of the problems associated with dual-systems theories that treat production and reproduction as analytically-separate phenomena. Certainly, integrating both social reproduction and biological reproduction can lead to abstract statements about their potential interaction. However, my argument, here, is only methodological. In empirical studies focusing on gender and the family, focusing on the dynamic interaction of these two 'spheres' can be useful. Capitalist relationships and familial and sexual relationships are not completely independent, and can interact in complex ways. Actively seeking the manifestations of that interaction, while not privileging

either 'sphere', can lead to insights as to how we should understand capitalism, gender-relations and the interactions between them.

*'Productive' and 'unproductive' labour*

Chattopadhyay writes that, while Marx has a concept of productive labour outside of a particular mode of production,<sup>72</sup> this is not the type of productive labour that he discusses most frequently. We should, he adds, at least consider more carefully the fact that it is the specifically capitalist form of productive labour that Marx emphasises, for example: 'Since the immediate purpose and the *authentic product* of capitalist production is *surplus-value*, *labour is only productive*, and an exponent of labour-power is only a *productive worker*, if it or he creates *surplus-value* directly, i.e. the only productive labour is that which is *directly consumed* in the course of production for the valorization of capital'.<sup>73</sup> Here, Marx points to the main feature of capitalist productive labour. It must create surplus-value for the capitalist.

As Marx argues repeatedly, the actual content of the labour and the intrinsic value for the worker are unimportant to the capitalist:

Milton produced *Paradise Lost* as a silkworm produces silk, as the activation of *his own* nature. . . . But the literary proletarian of Leipzig who produces books, such as compendia on political economy, at the behest of his publisher is pretty nearly a productive worker since his production is taken over by capital and only occurs in order to increase it. A singer who sings like a bird is an unproductive worker. If she sells her song for money, she is to that extent a wage-labourer or merchant. But if the same singer is engaged by an entrepreneur who makes her sing to make money, then she becomes a productive worker, since she *produces* capital directly. A schoolmaster who instructs others is not a productive worker. But a schoolmaster who works for wages in an institution along with others, using his own labour to increase the money of the entrepreneur who owns the knowledge-mongering institution, is a productive worker.<sup>74</sup>

Here, Marx points to the apparently incongruous nature of capitalism in which the definition of productive labour is based solely and one-sidedly on its ability to materially benefit the capitalist, while the actual quality and substance of the work is irrelevant. The concrete labour that produces use-values is abstracted into general labour, where only the abstract nature of

72. Chattopadhyay 1999, p. 71.

73. Marx 1976, p. 1038.

74. Marx 1976, p. 1044.

value is relevant to the capitalist: 'it is evident that for *labour to be designated productive*, qualities are required which are utterly unconnected with the *specific content* of the labour, with its particular utility or the use-value in which it is objectified'.<sup>75</sup> Thus, the capitalist drive for surplus-value can, and probably will, run counter to the real needs of society.

Moreover, in one passage of *Capital*, Marx appears to be suggesting that women's labour is only unproductive from a certain vantage-point. When discussing how machinery can lead to more and more workers becoming 'unproductive' labourers, Marx points out that 'it is possible to reproduce the ancient domestic slaves, on a constantly extending scale, under the name of a servant class, including men-servants, women-servants, lackeys, etc.'<sup>76</sup> In an effort to illustrate how few are still engaged in productive activity in the capitalist sense, he starts with the total population of the United Kingdom and subtracts bankers, landowners, criminals, paupers, government-workers, priests, lawyers, soldiers, those 'who are too old or young for work, all "*unproductive*" women, young persons and children'.<sup>77</sup> Marx's use of quotation-marks around 'unproductive' seems to illustrate that women's domestic labour is only unproductive from the capitalist point of view. However, Marx does not investigate this further.

In a 1912 speech, 'Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle', Rosa Luxemburg makes this point much more clearly:

Economically and socially, the women of the exploiting classes are not an independent segment of the population. Their only social function is to be tools of the natural propagation of the ruling classes. By contrast, the women of the proletariat are economically independent. They are productive for society like the men. By this I do not mean their bringing up children or their housework which helps men support their families on scanty wages. This kind of work is not productive in the sense of the present capitalist economy no matter how enormous an achievement the sacrifices and energy spent, the thousand little efforts add up to. This is but the private affair of the worker, his happiness and blessing, and for this reason nonexistent for our present society. As long as capitalism and the wage system rule, only that kind of work is considered productive which produces surplus value, which creates capitalist profit. From this point of view, the music hall dancer whose legs sweep profit into her employer's pocket is a productive worker, whereas all the toil of the proletarian women and mothers in the four walls of their homes is considered unproductive. This sounds brutal

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Marx 1976, p. 574.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., emphasis added.

and insane, but corresponds exactly to the brutality and insanity of our present capitalist economy.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, while women's work may be valuable to the perpetuation of the capitalist system, it is not seen as such, since it does not produce surplus-value for the capitalist, and is therefore devalued.

I would argue that, while there is nothing here that is specifically feminist in nature, Marx's singling out of the situation under capitalism in which the useful nature of a product and the useful labour that went into that product are abstracted out could, nevertheless, be compatible with a feminist interpretation. Here, Marx does not appear to be making a normative claim that the capitalist form of productive labour is desirable. Instead, he seems to be pointing to the contradictions that exist within capitalism and its views on productivity. Along with a number of other feminist scholars, Marx appears to see, at least in the abstract, inherent contradictions that exist within a system that views human need only in a very abstract form, where society is driven by the pursuit of profits. I believe that his feminist critics are correct to point out that what Marx fails to do is to illustrate how traditional women's work must necessarily be marginalised in the capitalist mode of production.

In contrast to feminists who have argued that Marx separated production and reproduction and also viewed women's labour as unproductive, I have argued for a more nuanced approach. While Marx was very far from developing a theory that took into account all the facets of the oppression of women, his dialectical theory of production leaves some room for such a development. Here, Marx does not appear to treat production and consumption as completely separate, nor does he appear to treat consumption as a reflex of production. The two are instead dialectically-integrated elements of the whole. Moreover, in his discussion of productive labour, Marx begins to make the distinction between productive labour under capitalism and productive labour *as such*. This provides some potential ground for criticism of the gendered value-structure of capitalism within a Marxian framework, although Marx did not carry this out.

## **Gender and the family in *Capital***

### *'The Working Day' and 'Machinery and Large-Scale Industry'*

In the 'Working Day' chapter of *Capital*, Marx not only records the plight of workers under capitalism, but also dialectically traces out the process of

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78 Luxemburg 2004, pp 240-1.



struggle between the capitalist and the worker over the limits of the working-day. As Dunayevskaya points out, this is a very important chapter in understanding Marx's overall theoretical approach in *Capital* and also to understanding the relations of capitalism themselves:

Whoever thinks that Marx spent sixty-four pages on 'sob-story stuff' is totally blind to the fact that society itself would have collapsed had the worker not fought for the shortening of the working day. The section on the 'Working Day' is one of the unique contributions to the analysis of human society. Any struggle by the workers to establish a normal working day was met with hostile opposition by the powers of the State as well as by the might of the capitalist. This 'protracted civil war' curbed the capitalist's disregard for human life. In three generations, capitalism used up nine generations of spinners. The workers learned labor solidarity and organized themselves against this mass slaughter.<sup>79</sup>

Marx begins by discussing the flexible nature of the working-day. There is a certain amount of time that the worker must rest and 'satisfy his intellectual and social requirements', and these vary based on the 'general level of civilization'.<sup>80</sup> While the worker would prefer to keep the working-day as short as possible, the capitalist seeks to extract as much surplus-value as he can from the labour that he has bought:

As a capitalist, he is only capital personified. His soul is the soul of capital. But capital has one sole driving force, the drive to valorize itself, to create surplus-value, to make its constant part, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labour. Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the worker works is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has bought from him. If the worker consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist.<sup>81</sup>

There is clearly a conflict of interest here, since both parties claim to have equal rights. The capitalist has paid for the labour of the worker for the whole working-day, but the worker claims that she cannot be put to work for the entire day, and that she needs time for rest and other activities. Resolution of this conflict is only possible through struggle between the workers and the capitalists as classes: 'Between equal rights, force decides. Hence, in the

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79. Dunayevskaya 2000, pp. 114–15.

80. Marx 1976, p. 341.

81. Marx 1976, p. 342.

history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day presents itself as a struggle over the limits of that day, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working class'.<sup>82</sup> From this struggle, there emerges a movement that seeks to put in place legislation that will limit the length of the working-day: 'For "protection" against the serpent of their agonies, the workers have to put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract of capital. In the place of the pompous catalogue of the "inalienable rights of man" there steps the modest Magna Carta of the legally limited working day, which at last makes clear "when the time which the worker sells is ended, and when his own begins"'.<sup>83</sup>

Marx carries out a similar discussion in regard to the application of machinery to industry. While machinery certainly does have the possibility of decreasing the amount of work done by the worker, this is not the case in its capitalist form: 'Because it is capital, the automatic mechanism is endowed, in the person of the capitalist, with consciousness and a will. As capital, therefore, it is animated by the drive to reduce to a minimum the resistance offered by man, that obstinate yet elastic natural barrier'.<sup>84</sup> This is especially the case because of the nature of the machinery and the drive of the capitalist to produce surplus-value. Machinery itself cannot produce more value than is put into it. It is only the worker that is capable of producing surplus-value. Thus,

there is an imminent contradiction in the application of machinery to the production of surplus-value, since, of the two factors of the surplus-value created by a given amount of capital, one, the rate of surplus-value, cannot be increased except by diminishing the other, the number of workers. This contradiction comes to light as soon as machinery has come into general use in a given industry, for then the value of the machine-produced commodity regulates the social value of all commodities of the same kind; and it is this contradiction which in turn drives the capitalist, without his being aware of the fact, to the most ruthless and excessive prolongation of the working day, in order that he may secure compensation for the decrease in the relative number of workers exploited by increasing not only relative but also absolute surplus labour.<sup>85</sup>

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82. Marx 1976, p. 344.

83. Marx 1976, p. 416.

84. Marx 1976, pp. 526–7.

85. Marx 1976, p. 531.

Capitalists face a situation in which they must eliminate a number of workers in order to make profitable use of their machinery. The introduction of machinery requires fewer people to produce the same amount of product, but since the machines themselves do not produce surplus-value, the workers that remain must work longer and harder than before in order to make up for this:

Partly by placing at the capitalists' disposal *new strata of the working class previously inaccessible to him*, partly by setting free the workers it supplants, machinery produces a surplus working population, which is compelled to submit to the dictates of capital. Hence that remarkable phenomenon in the history of modern industry, that machinery sweeps away every moral and natural restriction on the length of the working day. Hence too the economic paradox that the most powerful instrument for reducing labour-time suffers a dialectical inversion and becomes the most unfailing means for turning the whole lifetime of the worker and his family into labour-time at capital's disposal for its own valorization.<sup>86</sup>

This process draws in new classes of workers – most importantly women and children – since machinery requires less strength than what was previously needed. Moreover, this contributes to the creation of new arenas of struggle, including that of the domestic sphere and the traditional family structure, as will be seen below in Marx's discussion of the introduction of women and children into industry.

### *The effects of machinery on women*

The introduction of machinery had a profound effect on many social relationships, particularly in the public sphere but also in the private one. This was especially the case because machinery allowed for the introduction of women and children into industry:

In so far as machinery dispenses with muscular power, it becomes a means for employing workers of slight muscular strength, or whose bodily development is incomplete, but whose limbs are all the more supple. The labour of women and children was therefore the first result of the capitalist application of machinery! That mighty substitute for labour and for workers, the machine, was immediately transformed into a means for increasing the number of wage-labourers by enrolling, under the direct sway of capital, every member of the worker's family, without distinction of age or sex.

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86. Marx 1976, pp. 531–2, emphasis added.

Compulsory work for the capitalist usurped the place, not only of the children's play, but also of independent labour at home, within customary limits, for the family itself<sup>87</sup>

Machinery, according to Marx, created a situation in which those, who, before were less able to work in factories because of the physical strength required, could now be at least as productive if not more productive than the men who did this work. This allowed for a significant increase in the number of workers involved in industry and also had significant effects on the lives of women and children. Both were taken out of the home in order to do work that had traditionally been done by men. This, as Marx notes, would also have a significant effect on the traditional roles and relationships *within* the family, since it would be more difficult for women to carry out their traditional domestic roles as well as working in the factory.

As Leeb argues, this type of statement tends to 'reinforce the male/female (strong/weak) opposition in relation to the working-class woman' since women could only enter the workforce through the introduction of machinery.<sup>88</sup> This is especially true since Marx does not openly question women's weakness in relation to men. It is not necessary to follow Marx completely on this point, however. While it is probable that Marx was referring to women's supposed biologically-based physical inferiority, taking a more socially-based approach may be helpful.

Here, the important point is not the exact cause of the introduction of women into the workforce, but the fact that it *has* occurred following the introduction of machinery. Whether or not this was made possible because women were able to overcome their physical inferiority with the use of machines, or whether the use of machines allowed women into the workforce and thus eroded the ideology of women's inability to do certain work, Marx's most important point is that important barriers to women's entry into the workforce had been overcome. Thus women are not, by nature, forced to stay in the domestic sphere.

Marx not only notes that women and children are being brought into the workforce, but also that they are treated differently than adult-male workers. It is those on the lowest end of the social spectrum, women and children, who work in some of the least desirable jobs:

Owing to the excessive labour performed by their workers, both adult and non-adult, certain London firms where newspapers and books are printed have gained for themselves the honourable name of 'slaughter-houses'

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87. Marx 1976, p. 517.

88. Leeb 2007, p. 848.

Similar excesses occur in book-binding, where the victims are chiefly women, girls and children; young persons have to do heavy work in rope-works, and night-work in salt mines, candle factories and chemical works; young people are worked to death at turning the looms in silk weaving, when it is not carried on by machinery. One of the most shameful, dirtiest and worst paid jobs, a kind of labour on which women and young girls are by preference employed, is the sorting of rags. . . . The rag-sorters are carriers for the spread of small-pox and other infectious diseases, and they themselves are the first victims.<sup>89</sup>

**In addition to their work in factories, it was also primarily women and children who worked in domestic industries.<sup>90</sup> These industries, which had often not mechanised, were competing with modern large-scale industry and exploited their workers even more in order to stay competitive:**

The exploitation of cheap and immature labour-power is carried out in a more shameless manner in modern manufacture than in the factory proper. This is because the technical foundation of the factory system, namely the substitution of machines for muscular power, and the light character of the labour, is almost entirely absent in manufacture, and at the same time women and excessively young children are subjected quite unscrupulously to the influence of poisonous substances. In the so-called domestic industries this exploitation is still more shameless than in modern manufacture, because the workers' power of resistance declines with their dispersal; because a whole series of plundering parasites insinuate themselves between the actual employer and the worker he employs; because a domestic industry has always to compete either with the factory system, or with manufacturing in the same branch of production; because poverty robs the worker of conditions most essential to his labour, of space, light and ventilation; because employment becomes more and more irregular; and, finally, because in these last places of refuge for the masses made 'redundant' by large-scale industry and agriculture, competition for work necessarily attains its maximum. Economical use of the means of production, first systematically carried out in the factory system and coinciding there, from

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89. Marx 1976, pp. 592–3.

90. Here, Marx is referring to small-scale manufacturing in which work was done in cottages in relatively small villages. These typically employed only a few workers, and received their supplies from larger firms. At the time that Marx was writing, this system was in decline due to competition from firms who instituted a greater division of labour and used machinery. The small-scale domestic industries, with only a minimal division of labour, capital and technology, could only compete through a very harsh exploitation of their workers.

the very beginning, with the most reckless squandering of labour-power, and the theft of the normal requirements for the labour-function, now, in a given branch of industry, turns uppermost its antagonistic and murderous side; and the less the social productivity of labour and the technical basis for the combination of labour processes are developed in that branch, the more does the murderous side of this economy emerge<sup>91</sup>

Thus, in a number of ways, capitalism is able to use existing social inequalities to enhance the amount of surplus-value that it is able to extract. As Marx argues, this is especially true when capitalism mixes with other less-developed social and technological systems such as the feudally-based domestic industries, and they are forced to begin working under modern capitalist conditions that necessitate cheap labour. Since machinery is not an option here, the only way to get a maximum-amount of surplus-value is through the superexploitation of labour-power.

In addition to the dangerous nature of the work that they perform, women and children are often paid significantly less than men: 'In contrast with the period of manufacture, the division of labour is now based, wherever possible, on the employment of women, of children of all ages and of unskilled workers, in short, of "cheap labour", as the Englishman typically describes it'.<sup>92</sup> While Marx does not provide a detailed explanation for this, he does note capitalist efforts to bring the cost of the workers' subsistence to a minimum, especially in relation to women: 'In England women are still occasionally used instead of horses for hauling barges, because the labour required to produce horses and machines is an accurately known quantity, while that required to maintain the women of the surplus population is beneath all calculation. Hence we nowhere find a more shameless squandering of human labour-power for despicable purposes than in England, the land of machinery'.<sup>93</sup> Here, Marx points to the fact that capital's drive to produce surplus-value is so great that it would use workers for a job that could be done by horses or machines. This is another case where the capitalist interest in profit has become more important than the interests of the workers.

### *Women and morality*

While Marx appears to be relatively sympathetic overall to the entry of women into the workforce, despite its capitalist character, there are a few places where, especially in footnotes, he quotes without comment evidence

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91. Marx 1976, pp. 591–2.

92. Marx 1976, p. 590.

93. Marx 1976, p. 517.

from factory-inspectors' reports of the 'deterioration of character' of women due to the work that they were performing.<sup>94</sup> For example:

Both in Staffordshire and in South Wales young girls and women are employed on the pit banks and on the coke heaps, not only by day but also by night. This practice has been often noticed in Reports presented to Parliament, as being attended with great and notorious evils. These females employed with the men, hardly distinguished from them in their dress, and begrimed with dirt and smoke, are exposed to the deterioration of character, arising from their loss of self-respect, which can hardly fail to follow from their unfeminine occupation.<sup>95</sup>

As Leeb notes, it is certainly somewhat odd that Marx would quote these parts of the factory-inspectors' reports.<sup>96</sup> She argues that this suggests that, for Marx, 'the "unfeminine" woman becomes a "masculine man"' and that his use of quotations such as this without questioning them may 'hint at his own uneasiness about the male/female opposition'.<sup>97</sup> However, it is not exactly clear what the purpose of including this material is. As has been noted in the previous chapter, Marx saw morality as being based on specific historical developments. Thus, the 'deterioration of character' described in this passage would only be relevant to the specific bourgeois moral code, and not necessarily to previous or future organisation of society. Therefore, as we will see later in this chapter in relation to the changing nature of the family, he also sees the 'loss of self-respect' and 'deterioration of character' as possibly creating the ground for a new and better position for women. Here, however, Marx does not make this clear.

Some of the most seemingly-moralistic passages in Marx occur in his discussion of agricultural gangs made up of mostly young women and children. In these passages, Marx points to what he sees as both the freedom and the 'immorality' that work in these gangs offers young women, quoting a public-health report: 'They [the gangs] are to be met morning and evening on the roads, dressed in short petticoats, with suitable coats and boots, and sometimes trousers, looking wonderfully strong and healthy, but tainted with a customary immorality and heedless of the fatal results which their love of this busy and independent life is bringing on their unfortunate offspring who are pining at home'.<sup>98</sup> Marx then adds his own remark: 'All the phenomena

<sup>94</sup> For a different argument on Marx's moralism in *Capital*, see Wendling 2009

<sup>95</sup> Marx 1976, p. 368.

<sup>96</sup> Leeb 2007, p. 848.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Marx 1976, p. 522.

of the factory districts are reproduced here, including a yet higher degree of disguised infanticide and stupefaction of children with opiates'.<sup>99</sup> Here, Marx appears to be pointing to both the positive and negative aspects of women entering the workforce. These women are certainly independent and healthy, but this is only possible under the conditions of this stage of capitalism through the neglect of their children.

Leeb provides a somewhat different reading of this passage: "This gaze is not only disgusted by but also *desires* the woman, who appears in this scene as the "full" woman who leads an independent life, wears trousers and looks "wonderfully strong and healthy." However, such a desire for a woman, who does not fit neatly into the female side of the sexed opposition, becomes overshadowed by fears of her "customary immorality"'.<sup>100</sup> She is certainly correct to point to the ambiguity present in this passage from Marx. However, her argument that any sympathy or desire that he has for this woman is 'overshadowed by fears of her "immorality"' downplays the importance of Marx's comments on the ways in which capitalist relations bring this about.

Certainly, Marx provides some moralistic commentary that stems from Victorian ideology, especially when he discusses the 'coarse freedom' that was present in the gangs:

Coarse freedom, noisy jollity and the obscenest kind of impertinence give attractions to the gang. Generally the gang-master pays up in a public house; then he returns home at the head of the procession of gang members, reeling drunk, and propped up on either side by a stalwart virago, while children and young persons bring up the rear, boisterously, and singing mocking and bawdy songs. On the return journey what Fourier calls '*phanerogamie*' is the order of the day. Girls of 13 and 14 are commonly made pregnant by their male companions of the same age. The open villages, which supply the contingents for the gangs, become Sodoms and Gomorrah's, and have twice as high a rate of illegitimacy as the rest of the kingdom.<sup>101</sup>

These are not Marx's only comments on the gang-system, however. In a footnote to this passage, Marx points to the causes of this 'deterioration of character':

Under the accursed conditions to which these 'delicate' people condemn the agricultural labourer, it would not be surprising if he ate his own children. What is really wonderful is the healthy integrity of character he

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Leeb 2007, p. 850.

<sup>101</sup> Marx 1976, p. 852.



has largely retained. The official reports prove that the parents, even in the gang districts, loathe the gang-system.<sup>102</sup>

When Marx again touches upon the 'moral character' of the workers involved in this system, there also appears to be an element of criticism: 'The "drawbacks" of this system are the over-working of the children and young persons, the enormous marches that they make every day to and from the farms, which are five, six and sometimes seven miles away, and finally the demoralization of the "gang"'.<sup>103</sup> Here, Marx seems to conclude that the 'drawbacks' were only drawbacks from a certain perspective. The gang-leader certainly did benefit from the system, at least economically, by overworking his employees. Furthermore, there may be some criticism of the potential for the sexual exploitation in this system, although Marx is far from clear on this point and later in the passage returns to 'the moral character of girls bred in these schools'.<sup>104</sup>

In another passage, Marx argues that one of the causes of prostitution in his own time was the regulated-relay system where workers had to rest for short periods and then return to work:

During the 15 hours of the factory day, capital dragged in the worker now for 30 minutes, now for an hour, and then pushed him out afresh, hounding him hither and thither, in scattered shreds of time, without ever letting go until the full 10 hours of work was done, ... And just as an actor is committed to the stage throughout the whole course of the play, so the workers were committed to the factory the whole 15 hours, without reckoning the time taken in coming and going. Thus the hours of rest were turned into hours of enforced idleness, which drove the young men to the taverns and the young girls to the brothels.<sup>105</sup>

Since the workers had to stay close to the factory in their hours-'off', waiting to be put back to work, there was only a limited number of ways of occupying their time. In many cases, low-paid women turned to prostitution. While Leeb correctly points out that Marx does not discuss the reasons why women did this at this point,<sup>106</sup> in *The Holy Family* and other places, Marx pointed to women's precarious economic position as a cause of prostitution, as discussed in the previous chapter.

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102 Marx 1976, p. 854.

103 Marx 1976, p. 851.

104 Marx 1976, p. 852.

105 Marx 1976, p. 403.

106. Leeb 2007, p. 850.

Thus, in these passages, Marx appears to be struggling to reconcile his own overall theoretical views on the transitory nature of all kinds of 'morality' with some remnants of Victorian ideology. While it is theoretically logical that Marx would view women's moral state as transitory and changeable under a new mode of production, his position was rather ambiguous. He never really comes out clearly in either direction, thus, at least in this case, it appears that Marx, as a product of his own time, was blinded by the prevalent Victorian ideology of the period.<sup>107</sup> However, as we will see below, Marx did view the possibility of the family changing in a relatively positive light, despite its deleterious effects in his own time; although, even here, his discussion remains relatively abstract.

*The dialectics of the struggle over the working-day*

Marx not only commented on the condition of women in industry and domestic manufacture, but also discussed the role that women played in the development of the working-class movement. The introduction of women into industry had some unique and interesting effects on the nature of the workers' movement. Originally, it created an impetus to regulate the excesses of capitalism's exploitation of women's labour. As he wrote concerning the Factory Act of 1844:

It placed under protection a new category of workers, namely women over 18. They were placed in every respect on the same footing as young persons, their working hours limited to 12, and night-work forbidden to them. For the first time it was found necessary for the labour of adults to be controlled directly and officially by legislation. The Factory Report of 1844-5 states ironically 'No instances have come to my knowledge of adult women having expressed any regret at their rights being thus far interfered with'.<sup>108</sup>

As Marx notes, this was one of the first attempts to 'interfere' with the rights of workers to 'freely' negotiate wages with their employers. In the 'ideal' market-environment ridiculed by Marx as the 'realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham', there is no need to regulate labour-contracts because of this absolute equality, but when one leaves this ideal realm of the political economist in order to uncover the reality of these relations, 'He who was previously the money-owner now strides out in front as a capitalist;

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<sup>107</sup> Carver 1998 provides a slightly different interpretation of these passages from *Capital*, arguing that from the point of view of nineteenth-century feminism, Marx appears to have at least some feminist leanings.

<sup>108</sup> Marx 1976, p. 394.

the possessor of labour-power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning'.<sup>109</sup> Thus, the ideal notion of equality in the market is negated by the actual conditions in the factory, for both men and women. However, in terms of adult workers, this first became apparent with women who were, for a variety of reasons, less able to assert their own rights. Therefore, regulation of the 'free market' would be necessary, at least for women. While this began with women and children because of their historically-subordinate social status, this would set a precedent for future measures of this type for even adult-male workers.

Not only did the regulation of women's work alter the conditions for female labourers working in the protected industries, but it also had an effect on the conditions that male workers laboured under:

It has been seen that these highly detailed specifications, which regulate, with military uniformity, the times, the limits and the pauses of work by the stroke of the clock, were by no means a product of the fantasy of Members of Parliament. They developed gradually out of circumstances as natural laws of the modern mode of production. Their formulation, official recognition and proclamation by the state were the result of a long class struggle. One of their first consequences was that in practice the working day of adult males in factories became subject to the same limitations, since in most processes of production the co-operation of children, young persons and women is indispensable. On the whole, therefore, during the period from 1844 to 1847, the 12 hours' working day became universal and uniform in all branches of industry under the Factory Act.<sup>110</sup>

This is the case because 'capital is by its nature a leveler, ... It insists upon equality in the conditions of exploitation of labour in every sphere of production as its own innate right'.<sup>111</sup> As Marx and Engels discussed in *The Communist Manifesto*, capital acts as a universalising agent that seeks to dissolve all differences. However, this is only one tendency inherent to capitalism. Particularism, especially in the form of superexploitation of groups with less access to power such as women, children and ethnic minorities, is also compatible with capitalist accumulation in certain situations. In this case, however, the structure of these industries was such that the regulation

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<sup>109</sup> Marx 1976, p. 280.

<sup>110</sup> Marx 1976, pp. 394–5.

<sup>111</sup> Marx 1976, p. 520.

of one group of workers had the effect of regulating all workers in these industries.<sup>112</sup>

While this can, in certain situations, create conditions where the regulation of one group leads to the same regulations also applying to unaffected groups, it can have other, unintended consequences as well. For example, when the Ten Hours' Act sought to regulate the labour of women and children and enforce a maximum ten-hour day for these groups, 'The manufacturers began by here and there dismissing a number of the young persons and women they employed, in many cases half of them, and then, for the adult males, restoring night-work, which had almost disappeared. The Ten Hours' Act, they cried, leaves us no other alternative'.<sup>113</sup> Thus, in order to maintain a certain level of profit, capital fired workers that would work for less wages but could not work as long and replaced them with adult men, who were probably paid slightly more but could legally work longer hours and provide more surplus-labour-time to the capitalist.

Furthermore, as capitalists seek to increase the length and intensity of the working-day, there becomes a point where '[t]he cheapening of labour-power, by sheer abuse of the labour of women and children, by sheer robbery of every normal condition needed for work and living, and by the sheer brutality of over-work and night-work, finally comes up against certain insuperable natural obstacles,...When this point has at last been reached – and this takes many years – the hour has struck for the introduction of machinery, and for a thenceforth rapid transformation of the scattered domestic industries, as well as the manufactures, into factory industries'.<sup>114</sup> So the machine is introduced, at least in some cases, in order to increase the surplus-value extracted from the worker when the exploitation of the worker has reached its maximum-value.

The machines themselves create lighter work, at least in the sense that those with less physical strength are able to do the job. Additionally, machines require fewer workers to do the same amount of work as before. This tends to change the overall composition of the workforce:

The new machine-minders are exclusively girls and young women. With the help of mechanical force, they destroy the monopoly that male labour had of the heavier work, and they drive off from the lighter work numbers of old women and very young children. The over-powering competition crushes the weakest manual workers.<sup>115</sup>

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112 Ibid.

113 Marx 1976, p. 398.

114 Marx 1976, p. 599.

115 Marx 1976, p. 601.

Thus, machines increase the level of competition between workers. Women, at least to begin with, tend to be more competitive because they are willing to work for lower wages.

In order to be able to compete for jobs, working men must be willing to accept lower wages as well. Therefore, '[m]achinery, by this excessive addition of women and children to the working personnel, at last breaks the resistance which the male workers had continued to oppose to the despotism of capital throughout the period of manufacture'.<sup>116</sup> Thus, at least to some extent, the introduction of women and children into production has the effect of lowering the standard of living of the working class and potentially dividing them against each other. This is only possible because of the historical and modern oppression of these groups. Capital is able to use these differences to successfully divide the working class, at least under certain conditions. However, this is not inevitable. If workers joined together as a class and included women and children in unions, a new form of resistance could begin. This is something that Marx strongly supported and will be addressed in the next chapter.

Additionally, a number of capitalists are willing to exploit women's supposedly more-nurturing nature in order to produce more disciplined and docile workers, since they fear losing their jobs which help support their children:

Mr E., a manufacturer... informed me that he employed females exclusively at his power-loom... gives a decided preference to married females, especially those who have families at home dependent on them for support; they are attentive, docile, more so than unmarried females, and are compelled to use their utmost exertions to procure the necessities of life. Thus are the virtues, the peculiar virtues of the female character to be perverted to her injury – thus all that is most dutiful and tender in her nature is made a means of her bondage and suffering.<sup>117</sup>

Here, Marx quotes Lord Ashley on women's more nurturing 'nature' without questioning whether or not it is truly 'natural' for women to behave in this manner or whether this 'natural' state is socially mediated as well.

While many feminists have criticised Marx for not adequately dealing with gender in his work, at least in this part of his most influential book, Marx not only traces out the changing conditions of the male worker, but also gives significant emphasis to the role of women in this process, albeit sometimes echoing paternalistic or patriarchal assumptions, as seen above in the

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116 Marx 1976, p. 526.

117. Marx quoting Lord Ashley, *ibid.*

reference to women's 'nature'. In these two chapters, 'The Working Day' and 'Machinery and Large-Scale Industry' Marx documents the different conditions that women faced in the labour-market during that period. In addition, Marx relates these working-conditions back to his discussion of the labour-movement in general. While in this case, Marx does not state directly as he did in the case of slavery in the US that the condition of the most oppressed group made it impossible for other workers to use collective action effectively against capital,<sup>118</sup> a similar claim is implicit in his argument. In order for a labour-movement to be effective against capital, it must either remove all women and children from the workforce (and this could never be permanent due to the nature of capitalism) or it would have to incorporate women as equals to men. To a certain extent, capital had already done this, through its attempts to lower the wages and increase the hours of all workers. Thus women would have to play a significant role in the struggle for labour-rights.

### *Reprising the 'transformation' of the family in 'Capital'*

Similarly to the discussion of the abolition of the family in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx also writes about how the bourgeois family is being transformed by capitalism in *Capital*. As capitalist organisation of industry spread into the areas previously occupied by domestic industry, it helped to create further ground for the dissolution of the family:

As long as factory legislation is confined to regulating the labour done in factories, etc., it is regarded only as an interference with capital's right of exploitation. But when it comes to regulating so-called 'domestic labour', this is immediately viewed as a direct attack on the *patria potestas*,<sup>119</sup> or, in modern terms, parental authority. The tender-hearted English Parliament long affected to shrink from taking this step. The power of facts, however, at last compelled it to acknowledge that large-scale industry, in overturning the economic foundation of the old family system, and the family labour corresponding to it, had also dissolved the old family relationships.<sup>120</sup>

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118. 'In the United States of America, every independent workers' movement was paralysed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin. However, a new life immediately arose from the death of slavery'. Marx 1976, p. 414.

119. *Patria potestas* is a Roman term which refers to the power of the father – including the power of life and death – over all who lived in his house, including women, children and slaves. Here, Marx is referring to the continuation of a similar power with regard to the wife and children within the home.

120. Marx 1976, pp. 619–20.

Here, Marx notes that the barriers that were once in place to separate the public and private spheres, at least during the early stages of capitalism, were being broken down. As capitalist production extended to what had previously been the purely domestic labour of cottage-industries under the control of the head of household, it disrupted the absolute authority that could potentially be asserted by the male head of household. This occurred first in its efforts to make domestic industry more productive, and also through the state's legislation of this area. The conditions under which it was logical for anyone to think that the male head of household could have complete authority over his family were no longer in place. The state had to take over at least some of the economic aspects in order to protect the system from collapse.

This was the case because the process of women and children entering the labour-market eroded the power of the male head of household, since all members of the family who were able to work had to do so in order to support the family, instead of just the father:

The value of labour-power was determined, not only by the labour-time necessary to maintain the individual adult worker, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family onto the labour-market, spreads the value of the man's labour-power over his whole family. It thus depreciates it. To purchase the labour-power of a family of four workers may perhaps cost more than it formally did to purchase the labour-power of the head of the family, but, in return, four days' labour takes the place of one day's, and the price falls in proportion to the excess of the surplus labour of four over the surplus labour of one. In order that the family may live, four people must now provide not only labour for the capitalist, but also surplus labour. Thus we see that machinery, while augmenting the human material that forms capital's most characteristic field of exploitation, at the same time raises the degree of exploitation.<sup>121</sup>

Some feminist critics have emphasised the above passage. Benenson, for example, sees this as strong evidence for Marx's support of the family-wage. This is because he reads Marx as arguing that the main problem with capitalism is the exploitative relations between the worker and the capitalist. In this reading, it is the high degree of exploitation of workers that must be fought against:

This relationship of exploitation defined the antagonism of interests between capitalist and worker, and the basic objectives of the working class struggle.

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121. Marx 1976, p. 518.

Their elemental needs compelled workers to fight collectively to lower the degree of their exploitation (i.e., the proportion of unpaid surplus labor power which they rendered to capital). This goal had motivated the major working class movement discussed in *Capital*: the campaign of English workers for the Factory Acts. Their success in shortening the work day, as Marx pointed out, had in fact diminished the absolute rate of surplus value which their productive labor supported.<sup>122</sup>

Since, according to Benenson, the level of exploitation is a very important factor in Marx's critique of capitalism, he concludes that Marx implicitly supports the family-wage:

His argument implicitly supported working men's demands for a 'family maintenance' standard of wage-earning. This standard would hold exploitation in check by restricting the number of working class family members who labored for capital. Marx stated that the shortened workday embodied the principle of the working class 'political economy'. By analogy, the male sole-breadwinner pattern defined Marx' concept of its desirable 'family economy'.<sup>123</sup>

In his chapter on the working-day, Marx does discuss in great depth the worker's struggle for a shortened working-day, and he sees this as essential for the abolition of inequality. On the other hand, he clearly argues that shortening the working-day would not be enough. As long as the capitalist system remains in place, there will be a constant struggle between the worker and the capitalist, since the capitalist

is only capital personified. His soul is the soul of capital. But capital has one sole driving force, the drive to valorize itself, to create surplus-value, . . . Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the worker works is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has bought from him. If the worker consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist.<sup>124</sup>

Thus, a change in the level of exploitation of the system will not ameliorate the conflict.

Contrary to Benenson, Marx, in his discussion of the increasing exploitation of the working class, is making an empirical rather than a normative claim. The level of exploitation does increase because the capitalist has access to the

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122. Benenson 1984, p. 16.

123. Ibid.

124. Marx 1976, p. 342.



labour-time of four workers instead of one. The capitalist is, perhaps, paying more for the total labour-power, but he gets four times the surplus-value by employing more workers. Nowhere does Marx argue that this is either a good or a bad thing. Furthermore, Benenson misses the dialectical nature of his argument. As Marx would state later in this chapter, this form of exploitation also has some potentially positive effects:

It was not however the misuse of parental power that created the direct or indirect exploitation of immature labour-powers by capital, but rather the opposite, i.e. the capitalist mode of exploitation, by sweeping away the economic foundation which corresponded to parental power, made the use of parental power into its misuse. However terrible and disgusting the dissolution of the old family ties within the capitalist system *may appear*, large-scale industry, by assigning an important part in socially organized processes of production, outside the sphere of the domestic economy, to women, young persons and children of both sexes, does nevertheless *create a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes*. It is of course just as absurd to regard the Christian-Germanic form of the family as absolute and final as it would have been in the case of the ancient Roman, the ancient Greek or the Oriental forms, which, moreover, form a series in historical development. It is also obvious that the fact that *the collective working group is composed of individuals of both sexes and all ages must under the appropriate conditions turn into a source of humane development*, although in its spontaneously developed, brutal, capitalist form, the system works in the opposite direction, and becomes a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery, since here the worker exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the worker.<sup>125</sup>

Here, Marx appears to be summarising much of his previous argument in relation to capitalism's effects on the family. The old ties, based upon an economic system in which most, if not all, production occurred within the domestic sphere, had begun to dissolve as a result of production moving from primarily domestic to public, industrial production. While production only conditions, and does not determine, the form of the family, these significant changes in the production of the means of life have had significant effects on the ability of the feudally-based family – with its patriarchal structure – to function.

As discussed above, this has brought about a situation in which the patriarchal authority of the father has become less important. While previously,

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125. Marx 1976, pp. 620–1, emphasis added.

the father had been able to control the labour of those in his household, this power diminished as production moved into factories that were not under his control. He no longer controlled the means of production, and over time also lost the ability to support his family through his wages alone. Since he still had a great deal of authority, at least legally, he could force other members of his family to work. This type of exploitation, as well as the 'moral degeneration' that Marx discusses, illustrates the 'terrible and disgusting the dissolution of the old family ties within the capitalist system'.<sup>126</sup>

There is a second element in this process, however: the dialectical contradiction that unfolds as a result of these historical developments, which Leeb glosses over by focusing solely on Marx's emphasis on the 'frightful and disgusting' conditions caused by the breakup of the traditional family.<sup>127</sup> While she notes that Marx pointed to the role that capitalist relations can play in leading to 'a new economic basis for a higher form of the family and the relations between the sexes',<sup>128</sup> Leeb instead focuses on how even in this passage, Marx engages in 'moralistic interventions':

Nonetheless, in the same statement Marx argues that such an entry into the labor force leads to a 'frightful and disgusting' erosion of old family structures. This contradicts Marx's sharp critique of bourgeois family structures, which, as I explained earlier, connote according to him the slavery of women. I argue that this contradiction is not so much the result of Marx's fears about an erosion of family structures, but derives from his fear of women who threaten the stability of male/female opposition. It is precisely here where we are confronted with an unusual element in Marx's political philosophy: moralistic interventions.<sup>129</sup>

In contrast to Leeb's argument that Marx is engaging in moral commentary, I will argue that Marx appears, at the very least, to show some ambivalence toward the quotations citing the 'moral degeneration' of women under capitalism. While, earlier in the text, he used quotations from factory-reports without comment, here, Marx writes of the appearance of 'terrible and disgusting' conditions. Appearance is only one element of a very complex reality, which for Marx includes the possibility of further development. At this point, it is this potential for development that Marx is focusing on, rather than the negative effects it has on women. Thus, Marx does not appear to be contradicting his earlier critiques of the bourgeois family; instead, he is extending

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126 Marx 1976, p. 620.

127 Leeb 2007, p. 849.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

this critique to include the positive developments that are occurring even under capitalism, and which point in the direction of non-oppressive family structures, albeit in an abstract manner.

Here is where Marx's historical viewpoint of the family is relevant. The bourgeois form of the family, according to Marx, is only one of many forms and there is no reason to assume that it will be the final form that the family takes. As early as *The Communist Manifesto*, for example, he called for its radical transformation. Certainly, under capitalism, it can only be 'a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery', since its primary purpose is the perpetuation of the capital/labour relation through the production of more and more capital at the expense of human needs; but capitalism does more than just reproduce itself. It also creates the conditions for transformation into a new mode of production that can give rise to conditions for the 'humane development' of all.

While this is, admittedly, a brief and abstract discussion of the potential for changes in the family-structure, it is important to note that Marx posits this change occurring as a result of the cooperation of all workers, including women and youth. Here, Marx is not questioning the introduction of women into the workforce, let alone calling for a family-wage. Rather, he is pointing to the ways in which in the 'spontaneously developed, brutal, capitalist form, the system works' against the humane development of workers. Moreover, he is pointing in dialectical fashion to how these developments can under the right circumstances be transformed into their opposite – to a new form of the family.

Thus, capitalist development and the introduction of women into the workforce was two-sided. On the one hand, it transformed the structure of the family from a feudally-based form to a bourgeois one in which profit and egoistic interest were primarily. On the other hand, this dissolution of the feudally-based patriarchal family created the objective conditions necessary for the development of a new form of the family that would not be based upon the supposed inferiority of women. Marx did not discuss in detail such a transformation [*Aufhebung*] of the family, however.

## Conclusion

While Marx's work tended to focus primarily on political economy, he did not ignore the position of women entirely. Instead, Marx perceived significant changes that were occurring, due in part to capitalist development, with regard to the family. The old conditions of the family were beginning to dissolve as women and children began to play a significant role in capitalist

production. While Marx may have overestimated the scope of the changes that were occurring in the family and their potential to dissolve the oppressive patriarchal relations present in it, he was one of the few scholars at the time to posit the historical nature of the family.

Since the bourgeois family was only one type in a series of historical family forms, it too could be transformed. Despite some ambiguity on this point, Marx saw the potential for a new form of the family latent within capitalist society. Women were being drawn into the workforce and thus gained some independence, since the father or the husband could no longer completely control the family-income. Moreover, women were proving themselves to be capable workers, despite the traditional ideology that women belonged in the home.

However, the destruction of the family had a negative side as well. This was especially true for women and children. Despite their entry into the workforce, women were still responsible for childcare, something Marx notes somewhat uncritically. This led, in turn, to a situation in which young children were not receiving the care that they needed, and sometimes mothers would even kill their children with the use of opiates.

Marx's comments on exactly what the new form of the family would look like were very brief and abstract. Moreover, his apparent ambivalence on the moral position of women under capitalism would have likely clouded to some extent his views on such a new society. Like anyone else, Marx was a product of his own time and subject to its prejudices. However, some of his later writings that will be addressed in later chapters would seem to mitigate this to some extent.

Finally, Marx's overall analysis of capitalism points at least indirectly to some later feminist critiques on the devaluation of women's labour under capitalism. While Marx does not write of the devaluation of women's labour as such, he does discuss the ways in which classical-political economy and capitalistic relations themselves have put forward a one-sided view of useful labour that only takes into account its ability to produce surplus-value. This view of useful labour, which ignores women's unique contribution, is historically based and thus transitory. In this sense, Marx's historicist critique leaves room for a new model of gender-relations that can successfully integrate class- and gender-components.

## Marx's Journalism and Political Activities

While Marx is perhaps best-known for his theoretical writings on the capitalist system and his theory of social and political change, even in these writings, he never separated theory from practical activity. At the political level, Marx was engaged in workers' struggles in a number of ways. This can be seen most clearly through his activities in the International Workingmen's Association (hereafter, the First International) and its local and regional bodies. Marx was not only interested in the general struggles of labour, however.

As the last chapter indicated, Marx was also interested in the particular effects that capitalism had on women-workers. He saw that women were among the lowest-paid and most exploited members of the working class. While, in *Capital* and his other works on political economy, he never completely worked out a theory of patriarchy and its relation to the capitalist economic system, he did note some of the most damaging effects on women and the labour-movement in general. From this, it became clear to Marx that the labour-movement would have to include women as equals if they were to achieve any significant change. This argument was only implicit in *Capital*, but it becomes much clearer in some of his later political writings, including the 1880 'Programme of the Parti Ouvrier' (for the French Workers' Party) as well as some of his letters to fellow socialists.

While his empirical studies of women's labour in *Capital* certainly did draw his attention to these

issues, the 1871 revolutionary uprising known as the Paris Commune, which involved a large number of women, was also important in Marx's intellectual development on the subject. Not only did women participate in the Commune, but they also began to articulate specific demands to transform the condition and status of women-workers. After the Commune, Marx began to push more directly for equality between men and women within the First International.

This chapter will focus on Marx's political writings from the 1850s until the end of his life. From these writings, it becomes clear that Marx took seriously the oppression that women faced as women, and at least attempted to theorise the amelioration of their situation.<sup>1</sup> In his writings in the *New York Daily Tribune*, Marx addresses two cases that deal directly with women's oppression. The first involves the condition of women-workers in the textile-industry and their role in the Preston strike of 1853, while the second deals with the confinement in a mental institution of an aristocratic woman for attempting to speak out against her husband. Additionally, Marx saw the importance of women's involvement in the Paris Commune, and sent the young Russian émigré Elizabeth Dmitrieff to Paris as a representative of the First International. Dmitrieff, who fought at the barricades in the final days of the Commune, proceeded to organise the most important women's section of the Commune. Finally, following the Commune, Marx made efforts to include provisions for equal status between the sexes in the First International's sections and other labour-organisations.

## The Preston strikes and women's labour

The strike of the cotton-mill workers in Preston, England from 5 June 1853 to 15 May 1854 was one of the most important strikes of the time. The workers sought a return to the wages that they had received before being forced into a 10 percent cut in the recession of 1847. By the early 1850s, the English economy had fully recovered, in part due to the discovery of gold in California and Australia, but, as a result, the cotton-workers' wages were not able to keep up with the rising cost of food.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, after a two-month strike in Stockport in the spring of 1853, cotton-workers there were able to acquire

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1. Marx's own personal life had its own contradictions regarding his wife and family more generally. There is certainly strong evidence that he fathered a child with the family-housekeeper, Helen Demuth, for example. Due to space-constraints this cannot be dealt with here. For more on this, however, see Carver 1990 and 2005, Peters 1986, and Wheen 2001.

2. Marx 1975–2004a, p. 436.

the 10 per cent increase.<sup>3</sup> However, agitation for higher wages was made significantly more difficult by the Taiping Rebellion in China. At this time, China was one of the most important importers of English cotton, but, due to the Rebellion, their cotton-imports fell significantly, from 98 million yards in 1853 to 41 million yards in 1854.<sup>4</sup>

On 15 October 1853, the owners formed the Preston Masters' Association and locked out the workers.<sup>5</sup> Each member paid a bond of £5,000 to ensure that all the owners abided by the lockout.<sup>6</sup> About twenty-five to thirty thousand workers were involved, and were able to hold out for more than thirty-six weeks due to contributions from workers in other trades that were still at work.<sup>7</sup> Further efforts by the mill-owners to end the dispute included bringing in workers from Ireland and from English workhouses, including women and children, but the strike did not end until May 1854, when the workers returned to work without the 10 percent increase in wages.<sup>8</sup>

Writing on this topic for the *New York Daily Tribune*, Marx saw this as an important event in the development of the labour-movement. 'The eyes of the working classes are now fully opened: they begin to cry: "Our St. Petersburg is at Preston!"'<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the last eight months have seen a strange spectacle in the town – a standing army of 14,000 men and women subsidized by the trades unions and workshops of all parts of the United Kingdom, to fight out a grand social battle for mastery with the capitalists, and the capitalists of Preston, on their side, held up by the capitalists of Lancashire'.<sup>10</sup>

These events allowed Marx to comment more specifically on the condition of workers during this period. One issue which he commented on extensively was the introduction of women and children into the factories. As with his discussion of the factory in *Capital*, Marx was especially interested in the conditions of the most marginalised groups. Marx begins the article for the *Tribune* with a discussion of the general conditions of workers: 'In the last week of September, 1852, in the township of...four miles from..., at a bleaching and finishing establishment called..., belonging to..., Esq., the undermentioned parties attended their work *sixty hours* consecutively, with the exception of

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3 Taplin 1983, p. 452

4 Smith 1982, p. 51

5 Taplin 1983, p. 451

6 Smith 1982, p. 51

7 Marx 1975–2004b, p. 682

8 Ibid

9. During this period, Russia was seen as the most conservative power in Europe often directly or indirectly supporting conservative monarchical forces on the continent

10. Marx 1975–2004c, pp. 664–5.

*three hours for rest!*<sup>11</sup> He then noted that many of those working were young children:

Boys of nine and ten working 60 hours consecutively, with the exception of three hours' rest! Let the masters say nothing about neglecting education now. One of the above, Ann B., a little girl only nine years of age, fell on the floor asleep with exhaustion, during the 60 hours, she *was roused and cried, but was forced to resume work!*<sup>12</sup>

While, in this earlier article, Marx notes the severe exploitation that children faced, in a later piece, also for the *Tribune*, he relates this marginalisation and oppression more directly to capitalism, and at least indirectly to patriarchy. He does so with an ironic contrast between the solicitude of the British élite towards the fate of young women in Catholic nunneries, and the inattention toward those trapped in factories:

Notwithstanding the strong opposition of the Irish members, the House seems resolved to proceed with Mr Chambers's motion, and to appoint a Committee of Inquiry for the practices and household arrangements of the nunneries. The principal plea on which Mr. Chambers's motion intends to be based is the seclusion of girls forcibly held from their natural and legitimate protectors. The middle classes of England shudder at the probability of girls being kidnapped for nunneries, but their justice, shown in a recent case, becomes impotent when girls are kidnapped for satisfying the lust of aristocrats or caprice of cotton lords. Last week a girl of sixteen had been lured away from her parents, enticed into a Lancashire factory, and kept there night and day, made to sleep there, and take her meals there, locked up as in a prison. When her father discovered what had become of his child, he was not allowed to see her, but was driven away from the factory by the police. In this case the Factory law was violated, the law of personal liberty, the law that gives the father the custody of his child under age, the very right of habeas corpus was set at naught. A gross and flagrant case of abduction had been committed. But how did the magistrates act in this case, when the disconsolate father appealed to them for redress? Their answer was: 'They could do nothing in the matter'.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Marx notes that while the Protestant English élites were willing to take action to protect girls from the power of the Catholic Church, the same was not true when the offender was either a capitalist or another well-positioned

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11. Marx 1975–2004d, p. 469.

12. Ibid.

13. Marx 1975–2004b, p. 119.



male member of society. He suggests that female children in this period were seen, at least by the bourgeois and the aristocracy, as commodities. It was legitimate for these girls to be kidnapped and used as productive labourers or for other services, but not for religious purposes.

While the above dealt primarily with the exploitation of young children by the capitalist class, Marx addresses the Preston strikes and the role of women in these articles as well. Here, Marx notes the subjectivity of the women involved in the Preston strikes. While some of their actions would probably be criticised by feminists today as being either too moderate or perhaps anti-feminist, one must keep in mind the historical context. Even in England, capital had only just begun to incorporate women and children into the factories, and the male-breadwinner model was in most cases not questioned. In his 15 November 1853 article, Marx reports on efforts by women to ensure that men would be paid a 'family-wage' by quoting from a 5 November 1853 article from *The People's Paper*: 'Mrs. Margaret Fletcher addressed the assembly on the impropriety of married females working in factories and neglecting their children and household duties. Every man was entitled to a fair day's wages for a fair day's work, by which she meant, that he ought to have such remuneration for his labor as would afford him the means of maintaining himself and family in comfort; of keeping his wife at home to attend to domestic duties, and of educating his children'.<sup>14</sup> They further decided 'that the married portion of the females in this town do not intend to go to work again until their husbands are fairly and fully remunerated for their labor'.<sup>15</sup> Still further, while the rights of men to a fair wage were more important to women at this point, they would not remain content with this. Instead they decided that 'when the 10 per cent question was settled, there would be such an agitation raised respecting the employment of married women in factories as millowners of the country little expected'.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while the women viewed the family-wage and being able to fulfil their domestic duties as a starting point for a change in their families' status, they also began to see the importance of pushing for their own rights in the factory as well, although at this point, this was only of secondary concern. Later, as the labour-movement developed, this would change, and women began to assert their individual rights.

Here, Marx quotes from this speech without comment, illustrating, at best, some ambivalence for married women working in factories and potentially neglecting their children. However, Marx's position in later work illustrates some development on this point. As discussed in the previous chapter, Marx's

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<sup>14</sup> Marx 1975–2004d, p. 469.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Marx 1975–2004d, p. 470.

position on women in the workforce in *Capital* was less problematic than most feminists argue. While Marx showed some ambiguity regarding the 'moral' position of women in the workforce under capitalist social relations, he also pointed out that this was only a transitory condition. Under capitalism, women's entry in the workforce leads to a dissolution of the bourgeois family that appears 'terrible and disgusting', since the dissolution of these ties take place in a 'spontaneously developed, brutal, capitalist form'. Thus 'the system works in the opposite direction, and becomes a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery, since here the worker exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the worker'.<sup>17</sup> However, different social conditions can lead to 'a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Marx's position in *Capital* seems to leave open the possibility that the concept and practice of providing a family-wage could end as society develops.

Moreover, as we will see below in this and the following chapters, Marx's position on women's entry into the workforce appears to evolve further. From the beginning of the First International to the end of his life, Marx supported incorporating women into the workforce as equals. This point will be addressed later in this chapter. Additionally, in his notes on ethnology (discussed in Chapters Five and Six), Marx criticises a number of scholars for viewing the family as something static and based on the 'natural' roles of men and women. Here, Marx's historicisation of the family seems to point away from the 'family-wage', since it is ideologically based on these types of gender-stereotypes.

In a different article for the *Tribune* during the Preston strikes, Marx turns to the issue of women's education. The nature of the dominant ideology itself limits the education available to the middle-class, and especially middle-class women:

Although the middle class do not aim at the learning of the old school, they do not for that [sic] cultivate either modern science or literature. The ledger, the desk, business, that is education sufficient. Their daughters, when expensively educated, are superficially endowed with a few 'accomplishments'; but the real education of the mind and the storing it with knowledge is not even dreamed of.<sup>19</sup>

Here, Marx is pointing out that, for men, education is merely about learning how to be a good capitalist, and, for women, education is limited to their

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17 Marx 1976, p. 621.

18 Ibid.

19 Marx 1975–2004c, pp. 663–4.

duties as wives. In both cases, education is essentially used for conserving existing society, instead of the broader aim of improving the individual and society.

This very limited form of education for the middle-class leads to a situation in which this class is 'As full of presumption, affectation, petty tyranny and ignorance; and the civilized world has confirmed their verdict with the damning epigram that it has fixed to this class that "they are servile to those above, and tyrannical to those beneath them"'.<sup>20</sup> Here, Marx does not single out women's oppression in the family due to such 'servility' and 'tyranny', which he sees as common among the middle-class. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, he discusses this issue in some detail in the essay on suicide, with regard to paternal authority: 'Those who are most cowardly, who are least capable of resistance themselves, become unyielding as soon as they can exert absolute parental authority. The abuse of that authority also serves as a cruel substitute for all the submissiveness and dependency people in bourgeois society acquiesce in, willingly or unwillingly'.<sup>21</sup>

## The Bulwer-Lytton scandal

From 1849 until 1862, Marx was the chief European correspondent to the *New York Tribune*. In this period, he contributed hundreds of articles on European nations as well as their policies toward India and China. One of the most interesting, for the purposes of this study, is his work on the forced confinement of Lady Rosina Bulwer-Lytton. In 1858, Marx contributed two articles on Rosina Bulwer-Lytton's confinement to an asylum by her husband and son, 'Imprisonment of Lady Bulwer-Lytton' (23 July) and 'Romance in Real Life: Bulwer Imprisons His Wife, A False Charge of Insanity, The Compromise of Her Release' (7 August).<sup>22</sup> In both of these articles, Marx is very critical of the Bulwer-Lytton family for falsely imprisoning Lady Bulwer-Lytton, and of the British press for not adequately covering these events.

Both of these articles are of importance for understanding Marx's position on women, for a variety of reasons. First, as in his text on suicide, Marx is dealing with familial oppression outside of the working class, specifically as it relates to women. Second, as feminist theorists such as Chesler note, women

<sup>20</sup> Marx 1975–2004c, p. 664.

<sup>21</sup> Marx 1999, pp. 53–4.

<sup>22</sup> The 7 August article, originally written on 16 July, did not appear in the *New York Daily Tribune*. Instead, it was published in the *New York Weekly Tribune*, along with the 23 July article. This article does not appear in the *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (MECW), but was determined by Baumgart 1989 to have been written by Marx.

have tended to be labelled as insane at least in part because they are unwilling to perform their prescribed gender-roles to a satisfactory extent.<sup>25</sup> While Marx does not completely identify the extent to which gender factored into Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton's confinement, he does provide a strong critique of the practice of declaring a person insane as a means to control the behaviour of a family-member. Third, neither of these articles have been discussed in any significant detail, and the 7 August article does not appear in the *Marx-Engels Collected Works*.<sup>24</sup>

Edward Bulwer-Lytton was a well-known author and Tory politician at the time. While receiving some critical acclaim for his novels *Pellham, or, The Adventures of a Gentleman*, *The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Rienzi, Last of the Tribunes*, Bulwer-Lytton became most known for his florid writing style. In a facetious tribute to Bulwer-Lytton's *Paul Clifford*, which began with the words 'It was a dark and stormy night', San José State University gives an annual award for the worst opening line of a novel. While the subject of scorn today, in his own time, Bulwer-Lytton was a best-selling author and influential politician who held a seat as an MP from 1832–41 and was given the post of Colonial Secretary in 1858.<sup>25</sup>

Originally married in 1827, Edward George Bulwer-Lytton and Rosina Bulwer-Lytton separated in 1836, largely due to Edward's infidelity.<sup>26</sup> After the separation, the hostility between the two continued. To supplement her income, Lady Bulwer-Lytton wrote novels, some of which offered veiled attacks on her husband.<sup>27</sup> The most serious incident between the two took place in 1858, however. As Edward Bulwer-Lytton was giving a speech while running for reelection as to secure his appointment as Colonial Secretary, Lady Bulwer-Lytton interrupted the proceedings and gave a speech denouncing her husband, stating that 'instead of being appointed Secretary of the Colonies, Sir Edward ought to have been shipped to the Colonies long ago, at the expense of the country', i.e. to penal servitude.<sup>28</sup> She later approached the Mayor of Hertford – where Bulwer-Lytton was campaigning for a seat in Parliament – in order to rent a lecture-room in the town-hall, but was refused.<sup>29</sup>

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23. Chesler 1972.

24. Other than Baumgart 1989 and a brief mention by Dunayevskaya 1985, p. 194, I am unaware of any other authors who take up these important articles. Padover 1975 includes the first article in Volume 6 of *The Karl Marx Library*, but without discussion.

25. Brown 2004, pp. 983, 985.

26. Brown 2004, p. 984.

27. Mulvey-Roberts 2004, p. 994.

28. Marx 1975–2004e.

29. Ibid.

Embarrassed by these incidents, Edward Bulwer-Lytton and his son, Robert Lytton, conspired to have her declared insane and admitted to an asylum. Her admission to the asylum occurred after Lady Bulwer-Lytton returned to London to discuss a potential agreement with a friend of Edward's. The proposal stated that Bulwer-Lytton would pay off her debts and her income would be increased to £500 a year. She had met with the friend earlier, and had not received a reply either way. She informed Bulwer-Lytton that she would be returning to London to discuss the settlement. By the time she arrived, Bulwer-Lytton and his son had already obtained the necessary signatures from two doctors to declare her insane and were ready to have her escorted to the asylum.<sup>30</sup>

In the 23 July article, Marx criticises the British press for its failure to discuss this clear case of injustice. Largely due to Bulwer-Lytton's public position as both a writer and a politician, the press was unwilling to attack his character:

The great Bulwer scandal, which *The London Times* thought to be 'fortunately' hushed up by an amicable family arrangement, is far from having subsided into a state of quiescence. It is true that, despite the great party interest involved, the metropolitan press, with some trifling exceptions, did everything in its power to hush the case by a conspiracy of silence – Sir Edward Bulwer being one of the chiefs of the literary coterie which lords it more despotically over the heads of the London journalists than even party connection, and to openly affront whose wrath literary gentlemen generally lack the necessary courage.<sup>31</sup>

Other than publishing a few short paragraphs in each major newspaper, 'all these public guardians of liberty of the subject, while declaring themselves highly satisfied, deprecated any further indelicate intrusion upon the "painful matter"'.<sup>32</sup> Instead, it was only the 'irrespectable press' of the opposing party that used this as an opportunity for political gain.<sup>33</sup> If this case had not involved a public figure, and thus could not have been used for other motives, then it is likely that there would have been no penalty for these actions and that Lady Bulwer-Lytton would have remained in an asylum: 'For aught the chivalrous knights of the inkhorn would care about it, Lady Bulwer might have remained forever in a lunatic asylum, at London; she might have been disposed of more quietly than at St. Petersburg or Vienna; the conventionalities of literary decorum would have debarred her from any means of redress

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Marx 1975–2004e, p. 596.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Marx 1975–2004e, p. 597.

but for the happy circumstance of [the liberal politician] Palmerston's keen eye singling her out as the thin end of the wedge wherewith possibility to split a Tory Administration'.<sup>34</sup>

Here, Marx provides an interesting critique of the limits of British freedom regarding those declared insane. In this case, the law is analogous to that of Russia or Austria, where there were very few individual freedoms available at the time. Moreover, the only reason why this received any notice, in contrast to what was likely to be countless other similar cases of women falsely being declared insane, was because it was politically beneficial to Palmerston. Otherwise, this staunch defender of freedom in the abstract would have ignored this clear case of private and governmental repression.

In addition to criticising the press for inadequately addressing the situation, or only doing so for political reasons, Marx is also critical of British law, which had relatively low standards for committing someone to an asylum:

Yet, to secrete an obnoxious person in a mad-house, British law requires nothing beyond the declaration in writing of a relative, countersigned by two medical men, with whom fees and personal influence may go a great length in directing their opinions. The amended law, indeed, admits the sequestered individual to the benefit of a public inquiry, if he is possessed of friends who think it worth their while to protest in his name, and insist upon legal investigation. If such a proceeding answers the demands of justice, why not commit a person suspected of felony to the common jail on the secret declaration of a third party, countersigned by two solicitors, an inquiry afterward to be compellable when demanded by the friends of the prisoner? The surest way of rendering a person mad is to take him to the mad-house.<sup>35</sup>

While discussing the role that confinement based on the charge of insanity can play and the British government's tolerant stance towards it, Marx does not, however, directly note the fact that, in most cases, it is likely to be women who will be committed for a variety of reasons.

Additionally, Marx, making an argument similar to Foucault's later discussion of the role of institutions and insanity, points to the potentially negative role that mental-health institutions can play:

Surgeon Hill,<sup>36</sup> who trades upon his own account in 'lunacy,' has also come out with an apology, wherein he states that Lady Bulwer had never been

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Marx 1975–2004e.

<sup>36</sup> Here, Marx is referring to Robert Gardiner Hill, who is best known for his methods of treatment involving non-restraint at Lincoln Asylum. Later, in 1851, he opened a private asylum for women, where Lady Bulwer-Lytton would be treated.

locked in, but, on the contrary, had enjoyed the use of a brougham and driven almost every evening during her detention to Richmond, Acton, Hanwell, or Isleworth. Mr Hill forgets to tell the public that this 'improved treatment of the insane,' adopted by him, exactly corresponds to the official recommendation of the Commissioners in Lunacy. The friendly grimaces, the smiling forbearance, the childish coaxing, the oily twaddle, the knowing winks and the affected serenity of a band of trained attendants may drive a sensitive woman mad as well as douches, straight waistcoats, brutal keepers and dark wards.<sup>37</sup>

Here, Marx seems to be arguing that, on at least some level, mental institutions may do more to increase insanity than to cure it. This is true of the newer, gentler methods of treatment as well. Marx argues that being treated like an insane person and not being taken seriously can actually do more to cause insanity, or at least convince a person of their own insanity.

To some extent, this mirrors what Foucault would later write in *Madness and Civilization* regarding the modern asylum in France and its use of observation and judgement to perpetuate insanity:

Madness escaped from the arbitrary only in order to enter a kind of endless trial for which the asylum furnished simultaneously police, magistrates, and torturers; a trial whereby any transgression in life, by a virtue proper to life in the asylum, becomes a social crime, observed, condemned, and punished; a trial which has no outcome but in a perpetual recommencement in the internalized form of remorse . . . if they have the privilege of no longer being associated or identified with convicts, they are condemned, at every moment, to be subject to an accusation whose text is never given, for it is their entire life in the asylum which constitutes it.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, by more gentle treatments, the asylum was able to convince the patients that they were insane. Moreover, the patient would learn to internalise the norms expected of them, and thus discipline themselves, always seeing themselves as a deviant.

In the little-known 7 August follow-up article not included in the *Marx Engels Collected Works*, Marx argues that Lady Bulwer-Lytton was far from insane: rather, her actions were relatively rational. For years, she had tried to obtain a larger allowance from her husband, since she had found it to be insufficient. As she was unable to obtain any concessions from Bulwer-Lytton, she decided to escalate her efforts. She had reason to believe that she was entitled to a greater allowance, since Bulwer-Lytton's success in politics was

37. Marx 1975–2004e, p. 598.

38. Foucault 1984, p. 158.

at least partially related to her efforts when they were together. Moreover, she believed that he had used his influence to block the publication and sale of her novels:

At the time of her marriage she was possessed of a small property, worth about £400 per annum, which, as Sir Edward had not yet inherited his present large fortune, she transferred to him, in order to secure to him the property qualification required for Members of Parliament. On their separation in 1838, Bulwer consented to pay her £400 a year during his life, an annual income which, in consequence of liabilities successively incurred, had fallen below £180 a year. The literary publications with which she tried to eke out her income had, as she asserts, by the great influence Bulwer brought to bear upon publishers and critics, been shut out of the book market, and even become a new source of pecuniary embarrassment to her.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, Lady Bulwer-Lytton illustrated a great deal of rationality and calculation, while Bulwer-Lytton acted much less rationally:

Her repeated efforts to obtain an increase of allowance on the part of her husband, whose annual income had risen to £8,000 or £10,000, proving no more successful, she at last seized upon the Hertfordshire event as a proper opportunity for forcing her case into public attention. Her calculation has in fact proved to be far from 'insane'. The rage at this public exposure and the infatuation of newly-got power combined to seduce Bulwer into a step which, to use Talleyrand's bon mot, was not only a crime, but a fault.<sup>40</sup>

Clearly, Bulwer-Lytton had the financial resources to increase her allowance, or at least not interfere with her publishing efforts, but instead decided to engage in barely-legal measures to silence his wife.

In these two articles, Marx is especially critical of the handling of the situation by Edward Bulwer-Lytton and his son Robert, who used the laws on insanity to silence Lady Bulwer-Lytton. In defending his actions, 'Mr. Robert B. Lytton sets out by asserting that his "simple assertion" must be "at once believed in," because he is "the son of Lady Bulwer-Lytton, with the best right to speak on her behalf, and obviously with the best means of information." Now, this very tender son had neither cared for his mother, nor corresponded with her, nor seen her, for nearly seventeen years'.<sup>41</sup>

39. Marx 1975–2004e.

40. Ibid. This statement is sometimes instead attributed to Joseph Fouché, one of Napoleon I's officials. In any case, it concerns the summary execution of the Duke of Enghien, who was wrongly linked to an assassination-attempt on Napoleon in 1804. It is usually translated 'worse than a crime, a blunder'.

41. Marx 1975–2004e, pp. 597–8.



Moreover, the justification offered by Robert Lytton himself indicates that they were not looking out for the best interests of Lady Bulwer-Lytton, stating 'From the moment my father felt compelled to authorize those steps which have been made the subject of so much misrepresentation, his anxiety was to obtain the opinion of the most experienced and able physicians, in order that my mother should not be subject to restraint for one moment longer than was strictly justifiable. Such was his charge to me'.<sup>42</sup> As Marx notes, their concern was not for assuring that they were doing the right thing by putting her in an asylum, but that she would not be released too soon: 'From the evasive wording of this studiously awkward passage it appears, then, that Sir Edward Bulwer felt the necessity of authoritative medical advice, not for sequestering his wife as insane, but for setting her free as *mentis compos* [being in her right mind]'.<sup>43</sup> This, however, was not the most important thing for Marx. Instead 'The thing to be proved to the public was, not that Lady Bulwer's liberation, but on the contrary, that her restraint was justified'.<sup>44</sup> Here, Marx is arguing again that Lady Bulwer-Lytton's confinement was not warranted, since they offered no real evidence of her insanity. The two men were much more interested in silencing an unruly woman than ensuring her safety.

Even after her release, Lady Bulwer-Lytton was far from being completely free. According to the terms of the agreement of her release, she had to live with her son, and could only travel if she was accompanied by him and 'a female friend and relation, of her own selection'.<sup>45</sup> Marx then pointed out the unequal power under which this agreement took place, and how this agreement had been successful in silencing her:

Has, then, Lady Bulwer been removed from her place of confinement at Brentford to a place of confinement at London, and been bodily delivered up to an exasperated foe? Who warrants her being 'free from all restraint?' At all events, when signing the proposed compromise, she was not free from restraint, but smarting under Surgeon Hill's improved system. The most important circumstance is this: While Sir Edward has spoken, Lady Bulwer has kept silence. No declaration on her part, given as she is to literary exercise, has met the public eye. An account written by herself, of her own treatment, has been cleverly withdrawn from the hands of the individual to whom it was addressed.<sup>46</sup>

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42 Marx 1975-2004e, p. 599.

43 Ibid.

44 Marx 1975-2004e, pp. 599-600.

45 Marx 1975-2004e, p. 600.

46 Ibid.

Lady Bulwer-Lytton was able to leave the asylum; however, there remained significant limits to her freedom. As Marx notes, her decision to agree to the settlement occurred while she was still in the asylum and did not have much choice other than to sign. Moreover, since she was under the supervision of her son, she was unable to tell her side of the story. In contrast, no such restriction was placed on Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Thus, Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Robert Lytton were able to use the power of the state, and its unequal treatment of women and those thought to be insane, in order to silence a troublesome woman.

## Women and the First International

The First International, founded in London in 1864, was an organisation of leftist political groups and trade-unions in which Marx played a significant role, until its collapse in 1876 due to internal disputes. In its eight years of existence, it was an important element for assisting workers' struggles. Moreover, a number of its members were involved in the Paris Commune of 1871. While there is little reference to women-workers in the first two years of the International (1864–5), Marx's 1866 'Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council' provides valuable insight into his views on working women in the period that he was finishing the first volume of *Capital*. This text, which he drafted for the delegates to the First Congress of the International in Geneva (3–8 September 1866), has significant discussions on the shortening of the working-day and on the position that the organisation should take toward women's and children's labour.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it parallels Marx's discussion of the working-day in *Capital*, as discussed in the previous chapter.

As was the case in *Capital*, here Marx shows some degree of ambivalence concerning women-workers, but, on the whole, favours their inclusion into the workforce, due to its potentially progressive effects. In his discussion of the limitation of the working-day, Marx begins with the general statement that 'a preliminary condition, without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation must prove abortive, is the *limitation of the working day*'.<sup>48</sup> The working-day should be limited to eight hours for all adults, with some further restrictions on women's work: 'This paragraph [on the detailed regulations of the eight-hour day] refers only to adult persons, male or female, the latter, however, to be rigorously excluded from all *nightwork whatever*, and

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<sup>47</sup> GCM 1964a

<sup>48</sup> GCM 1964a, p. 342.

all sort [sic] of work hurtful to the delicacy of the sex, or exposing their bodies to poisonous and otherwise deleterious agencies. By adult persons we understand all persons having reached or passed the age of 18 years'.<sup>49</sup> Here, Marx is clearly evincing the Victorian morality of his time, whether for political reasons or because of his own beliefs.

At the same time, however, Marx saw these limitations on capital's exploitation of women's labour as opening up freedoms for male workers as well. This becomes clearer when the last sentence of the paragraph proceeding the above-quoted words is taken into account. 'Nightwork to be but exceptionally permitted, in trades or branches of trades specified by law. The tendency must be to suppress all nightwork'.<sup>50</sup> Similarly to his discussion in *Capital* of legislation to impose legal limitations on the working-day, Marx appears to see restrictions on women's labour as a means to make similar restrictions to the benefit of adult-male labourers as well. It is not clear, however, whether, or to what extent, this would apply to other restrictions placed on women's work, but since Marx sees a tendency within capitalism to act as a leveller of all labour, it is likely that dangerous work for men could also be transformed by such legislation, in the long term: 'Nobody denied, nowadays, that the State must interfere on behalf of the women and children; and a restriction of their hours led, in most instances, to a reduction of the working time of the men'.<sup>51</sup>

Marx's discussion of child-labour is also instructive in terms of understanding his views on familial oppression. Marx argues that the introduction of children into the workforce should not be opposed as such; instead it is only problematic in its exploitative capitalist form: 'We consider the tendency of modern industry to make children and juvenile persons of both sexes co-operate in the great work of social production, as a progressive, sound and legitimate tendency, although under capital it was distorted into an abomination. In a rational state of society *every child whatever*, from the age of 9 years, ought to become a productive labourer in the same way that no able-bodied adult person ought to be exempted from the general law of nature, viz.: to work in order to be able to eat, and work not only with the brain but with the hands too'.<sup>52</sup> Here, Marx appears to be returning to his view of the importance of creative work in the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology*, where he argued that work is a necessity of life and an important element of humanity's species-character. According to Marx, all children should work in order to

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49 GCM 1964a, p. 343.

50 Ibid.

51 GCM 1964b, p. 244.

52 GCM 1964a, pp. 343–4.

develop their potential, both mentally and physically. This process has been 'distorted' and transformed into a means of destroying the species-character under capitalism, but, for Marx, it is possible to change this.

Marx continues his discussion, making no distinction between boys and girls for regulating children's work<sup>53</sup> and again points to familial oppression of children, due in large part to the effects of capitalism:

But we deal here only with the most indispensable antidotes against the tendencies of a social system which degrades the working man into a mere instrument for the accumulation of capital, and transforms parents by their necessities into slave-holders, sellers of their own children. The *right* of children and juvenile persons must be vindicated. They are unable to act for themselves. It is, therefore, the duty of society to act on their behalf.<sup>54</sup>

The discussion of the 'right of children and juvenile persons' does not end with paternalistic legislation, however. The combination of 'mental education', 'bodily education', and 'technical training' has the potential of creating a new class of workers who will be much more able to control their own destiny than their parents:

The working man is no free agent. In too many cases, he is even too ignorant to understand the true interest of his child, or the normal conditions of human development. However, the more enlightened part of the working class fully understands that the future of its class, and, therefore, of mankind, altogether depends upon the formation of the rising working generation. They know that, before everything else, the children and juvenile workers must be saved from the crushing effects of the present system. This can only be effected by converting *social reason* into *social force*, and, under given circumstances, there exists no other method of doing so, than through *general laws*, enforced by the power of the state. In enforcing such laws, the working class do not fortify governmental power. On the contrary, they transform that power, now used against them, into their own agency. They effect by a general act what they would vainly attempt by a multitude of isolated individual efforts.<sup>55</sup>

Here, Marx points to the necessity of transformative social change. 'Social reason' must be changed into the 'social force' of working-class action. Moreover, Marx sees the potential role of education combined with action as a means to move beyond the ideological formulations of the time. Whether or not this

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53. GCM 1964a, p. 344.

54. Ibid.

55. GCM 1964a, p. 345.

also applied to the position of women in the workplace is not entirely clear, although the fact that Marx does not make gender-distinctions with regard to child-labour, along with his statements about adult-nightwork, seem to indicate that the new generation of workers could potentially be less sex-segregated.

Similarly to his discussion of machinery in *Capital* (as discussed in Chapter Three), during the General Council sessions in July 1868, Marx brought the introduction of women and children into the discussion. In his opening remarks on the topic, Marx gave a dialectical perspective on the effects of machinery in terms of the introduction of women and children into the workforce:

Another consequence of the use of machinery was to force women and children into the factory. The woman has thus become an active agent in our social production. Formerly female and children's labour was carried on within the family circle. I do not say that it is wrong that women and children should participate in our social production. I think every child above the age of nine ought to be employed at productive labour a portion of its time, but the way in which they are made to work under existing circumstances is abominable.<sup>56</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Three, Marx saw the introduction of machinery as an important element in terms of introducing women and children into the workforce. With the use of machinery, certain jobs that formally required a great deal of physical strength could be done by almost anyone. This has a variety of both positive and negative effects, according to Marx. Here, Marx not only gives his support for women entering the workforce, but also notes the specifically capitalist nature of the working conditions which are 'abominable'. Additionally, Marx points to the fact that women engaging in social production is not a new thing. Rather, what is new is that production now takes place outside of the home instead of 'within the family circle'. Moreover, in his conclusion, Marx notes the positive effects of machinery: similarly to his discussion in *The Communist Manifesto*, he states that 'machinery leads on one hand to associated organized labour, on the other to the disintegration of all formerly existing social and family relations'.<sup>57</sup>

The years of 1868 and 1869 were relatively active in terms of strikes and general labour-unrest. Toward the end of 1868, a group of silk-weavers and ribbon-makers went on strike in Lyons, France. In his 'Report of the General

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<sup>56</sup> GCM 1964b, p. 232.

<sup>57</sup> GCM 1964b, p. 233.

Council to the Fourth Annual Congress', Marx notes the role played by mostly-female workers, who went on strike despite economic difficulties and police-repression: 'Shortly after the Ricamarie massacres, the dance of the economical revolts was opened at Lyons by the silk-winders, most of them females... At Lyons, as before at Rouen, the female workers played a noble and prominent part in the movement'.<sup>58</sup> Here, again, Marx notes the importance of women to the labour-movement.

## Marx and the Kugelmanns

Responding to a December 1862 inquiry into his economic work by a German gynaecologist, Ludwig Kugelmann, Marx began a series of correspondence about economics and the prospects for a German revolution.<sup>59</sup> Later, Marx stayed with the Kugelmanns in Hanover in 1867 as *Capital* was being published, and again later in 1869, this time along with his daughter Jenny.<sup>60</sup> While these meetings seemed to occur without significant incident, a later meeting in Carlsbad, Austria would lead to a complete break in their friendship over a family-dispute.

In May 1874, Marx, who was ill at the time, asked Kugelmann to join him later in the year in Carlsbad, where he had orders from his doctor to go for the supposedly-healing waters.<sup>61</sup> Kugelmann arranged most of the details, including the lodging, and met Marx there in September. During his stay in Carlsbad, Marx witnessed the full extent of Kugelmann's sexist treatment of his wife when he heard an argument between the couple through the hotel-walls. Recounting this in a letter to Engels of 18 September 1874, he wrote:

you will appreciate how unbearable Kugelmann has become in the long run. He had been so considerate as to give me a room between his and Tussy's so that I enjoyed him, not just when we were together, but also when I was alone. I patiently endured the way he incessantly poured out his solemn, long-winded balderdash in his deep voice... But my patience came to an end finally when he inflicted his family scenes on me. The fact is that this arch-pedant, the pettifogging, bourgeois philistine has got the idea that his wife is unable to understand him, to comprehend his Faustian nature with its aspirations to a higher world outlook, and he torments the woman, who is his superior in every respect, in the most repulsive manner.

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58. GCM 1964c, p. 336.

59. Draper 1985, p. 114.

60. Kapp 1972, p. 166.

61. Marx 1975–2004f, p. 17.

So it led to a quarrel between us; I moved to a higher floor, completely liberated myself from him (he was having a ruinous effect on my cure) and we only became reconciled once more just before his departure (which took place last Sunday). However, I declared point-blank that I would not visit him in Hanover.<sup>62</sup>

Here, Marx points out Kugelmann's chauvinism and incessant criticism of his wife, whom Marx seemed to hold in much higher esteem than her husband, whom he had consulted on a number of occasions about the prospects of revolution in Germany and with whom he discussed his most important economic work. Karl and Eleanor Marx took the side of Mrs. Kugelmann and her daughter in this squabble, which occurred over a relatively minor event: 'The grand scene began because Mrs. K didn't lift up her dress on a dusty day'.<sup>63</sup>

While this was certainly the most important event that led to the break between Marx and Kugelmann, there is some evidence to indicate that Marx was aware of Kugelmann's sexism before this. There are no prior letters from Marx to Engels or others where he shared this perception of Kugelmann, but Marx's letters to Kugelmann hint at some disagreement with him on women's role in society. This is particularly true in two letters from December 1868. In the 5 December letter, Marx asks Kugelmann: 'Is your wife also active in the German ladies' great emancipation campaign? I think that German women should begin by driving their husbands to self-emancipation'.<sup>64</sup> Here, Marx seems to be saying that German women are perhaps more revolutionary than their husbands. It may have also been an attempt to get Kugelmann to take his wife a little more seriously, but Marx's intention is not all that clear in this passage. Moreover, in his next letter (12 December), Marx appears to at least in part take back this comment: 'tell your dear wife that I never "suspected" her of serving under Madame General Geck. I queried only in jest'.<sup>65</sup>

However, this is not the end of his discussion of women in this letter. Marx continues: 'The ladies cannot complain about the "*International*", since it has appointed a lady, Madame Law, as a member of the *General Council*. Joking aside, very great progress was demonstrated at the last congress of the American "*Labor Union*", inter alia, by the fact that it treated the women workers with full parity; by contrast, the English, and to an even greater extent the

62 Marx 1975–2004g, p. 46

63 E. Marx 1982, p. 117

64 Marx 1975–2004h, p. 173

65 Marx 1975–2004i, p. 184. Here, Marx appears to be referring to Swiss socialist Marie Goegg, the chairwoman of the women's section of the *International* at the time. Padover 1975, p. 144.

gallant French, are displaying a marked narrowness of spirit in this respect'.<sup>66</sup> Despite a somewhat condescending tone, Marx not only argues that the US trade-union movement was moving toward women's equality, but also notes that a woman had been elected to the highest-ranking body of the International. This, for Marx, was an important measure of progress, especially in relation to some of the other national organisations involved in the International.

Marx continues by emphasising how important women's participation is for the labour- and socialist movements as a whole: 'Everyone who knows anything of history also knows that great social revolutions are impossible without the feminine ferment. Social progress may be measured precisely by the social position of the fair sex (plain ones included)'.<sup>67</sup> Here, Marx is arguing that women are important actors for social change, and that for any further progressive social change to occur, it is necessary for women to be involved as equals. This was certainly the case three years later, where women were very involved in the activities of the Paris Commune, in many cases defending the city as the Versailles government's forces attacked. Moreover, Marx's inclusion of a parenthetical reference to the 'plain ones', while possibly condescending, may also have been an attempt to illustrate to Kugelmann that women were capable of much more than being men's sexual objects. Instead, women could be active subjects in their own right, both intellectually and in practice.

The Marx-Kugelmann relationship was an interesting one for a number of reasons. First, it is in his letters to Kugelmann that Marx gave detailed information on the work that he was doing at the time, especially on *Capital*. Second, and more important for this study, Marx discussed women's role in the social transformations at the time, and seemed to challenge Kugelmann's sexist views. This was especially the case during their vacation in Carlsbad in 1874, where, as we saw, Marx defended Kugelmann's wife in the argument between the two. This led to a complete break in communication with Kugelmann.<sup>68</sup>

## Women and the Paris Commune

In July 1870, the French government, then under the leadership of Napoleon III, declared war on Prussia. Many workers opposed the war from the very beginning, but as it became clear that the war was going badly and as the people were less willing to accept rationing for a war that they did not support,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Kapp 1972, p. 167.



dissent grew.<sup>69</sup> When news came that Bonaparte had been captured by the Prussians, a coup was carried out on 4 September 1870, and a republic was proclaimed once again, albeit under a fairly conservative leadership that excluded the Left.<sup>70</sup> The war continued for a short time, however, and Paris was besieged on 19 September.<sup>71</sup>

While Paris continued to suffer from shortages and skyrocketing prices for basic provisions, the Government of National Defence maintained a weak effort to defend France. In January 1871, 'fearing urban social unrest more than Prussian domination' the government surrendered to Prussia.<sup>72</sup> A peace-treaty was then concluded with Prussia. France was forced to 'pay 5 billion francs and hand over all of Alsace, save Belfort, and a part of Lorraine to the Germans'.<sup>73</sup> Operating through a National Assembly, based outside Paris in Versailles, the government quickly began a crackdown on Paris. "The Assembly "of Notables", for its part, took the most reactionary measures possible: the bills that had fallen due between August 13 and November 13, 1870, were immediately payable, the moratorium on rent payments and the National Guard's pay were cancelled. In Paris, where commerce and industry had been paralyzed by the Siege, where famine was rampant, this meant that many people were rendered destitute'.<sup>74</sup>

While all of these measures certainly had a negative impact on the people of Paris, it was the dispute over cannons that eventually led to the declaration of the Commune. The cannons that Prime Minister Adolphe Thiers<sup>75</sup> wanted returned to the government were seen as the property of the people of Paris, who had paid for them through subscriptions to the National Guard, and this was even recognised to be the case in the agreement with the Prussians.<sup>76</sup> As the troops entered into the Montmartre district of Paris to retrieve the cannons, women and children began to gather and fraternise with the troops. When the order was given to fire into the crowd, the soldiers refused and arrested the general.<sup>77</sup> The cannons remained in the hands of the Parisians. Eight days later, on 26 March, the Commune was officially elected.<sup>78</sup>

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69 Thomas 2007, pp. 35–6.

70 Thomas 2007, p. 36.

71 Thomas 2007, p. 38.

72 Eichner 2004, p. 21.

73 Thomas 2007, p. 50.

74 Thomas 2007, p. 51.

75 At this time, Thiers was the leader of the new republican government of France in Versailles, which had signed an armistice with Prussia. He would later call for the brutal suppression of the Commune.

76 Marx 1996a, p. 173.

77 Thomas 2007, p. 54.

78 Thomas 2007, p. 56.

The short-lived Commune, while far from an ideal model of socialism, was able to enact a significant number of reforms, including instituting universal manhood-suffrage, democratic rule of workers at 'workmen's wages', and providing significant protection for workers and free education for all.<sup>79</sup> The Commune, however, would be brutally suppressed in May 1871 as the Versailles government's troops entered the city. Summary executions, especially of those women-'incendiaries' thought to be involved in the fighting – and to have started fires – were common.<sup>80</sup> While estimates range widely, it seems clear that at least twenty thousand died in this battle for Paris, and many more were exiled or sent to prison after trials.<sup>81</sup>

In May 1871, Marx wrote an address to the General Council of the First International, 'The Civil War in France'.<sup>82</sup> On 30 May 1871, the General Council approved the text as their statement on the events in France.<sup>83</sup> Within this address, Marx discussed both the political context of these events and, more importantly, the achievements of the Commune. One of the most important of these, for Marx, was the structure of communal governance itself. Instead of the state being above society, in the case of the Commune, it was a part of society:

The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time.... From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at *workmen's wages*. The vested interests and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of state disappeared along with the high dignitaries themselves. Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the Central government. Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the state was laid into the hands of the Commune.<sup>84</sup>

**Furthermore, while this was not a perfect system, it was a system that was necessary at the time for the economic emancipation of the producing class:**

It was essentially a working-class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour.

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79. Marx 1996a, pp. 184–5.

80. Thomas 2007, p. 160.

81. Gullickson 1996, p. 223.

82. Marx 1975–2004j, p. 308.

83. Marx 1975–2004j, p. 666.

84. Marx 1996a, p. 184.

Except on this last condition, the Communal constitution would have been an impossibility and a delusion. The political rule of the producer cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery. The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule. With labour emancipated, every man becomes a working man, and productive labour ceases to be a class attribute.<sup>85</sup>

As Marx states, the communal system such as that set up in Paris is not the end-goal of society. Instead it was merely the form in which struggle could continue:

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending, by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideas to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant.<sup>86</sup>

One of the most important figures of the Paris Commune, Elizabeth (Tomanovskaya) Dmitrieff, was an associate of Marx, and was sent to Paris by the General Council of the International as its representative.<sup>87</sup> Tomanovskaya, who during the Commune used the masculine version of her grandmother's maiden-name, Dmitrieff, was a 20 year-old Russian influenced strongly both by Marx and the Russian Populist Nicolas Chernyshevsky, who advocated 'the radical restructuring of society into working and living cooperatives, based upon the Russian peasant commune as a naturally socialist form'.<sup>88</sup>

Dmitrieff first met Marx when she was acting as a Russian revolutionary envoy to London, after Marx had been asked by the Russians to represent them on the General Council.<sup>89</sup> She arrived in London in December 1870, and quickly impressed and befriended Marx and his daughters.<sup>90</sup> Marx respected her intellectual abilities, and requested information on the viability of the Russian rural communes as a possible means of development towards

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85. Marx 1996a, p. 187.

86. Marx 1996a, p. 188.

87. Eichner 2004, p. 65.

88. Eichner 2004, p. 63.

89. Eichner 2004, p. 64.

90. Ibid.

communism.<sup>91</sup> Her response to this is less optimistic about the communal system than what Marx would later write in his drafts to Zasulich, where he argued that the rural communes might survive if they were revolutionised:

Its transformation into small individual ownership is, unhappily, more than probable. All government measures... have the singular goal of introducing private property, by the means of suppressing collective responsibility. A law passed last year has already abolished [collective ownership] in communes with fewer than forty souls (men's souls, because women, unhappily, do not have souls).<sup>92</sup>

While Marx only discussed the actions that women took to defend the city, and not their other political actions during the Commune, women were very much involved in the governance of the city. Women supported the Commune at least in part because it economically supported them and their families:

The men of the Commune did not foresee for a single instant that women might have civic rights, any more than did their 'great forebears' of 1789 and 1793, or the 1848 revolutionaries. But certain measures, like the remission of rent payments or the discontinuation of the sale of articles deposited at the Mont-de-Piété, affected women directly. A 600-franc pension was to be granted the wife, legal or not, of any member of the National Guard who had been killed defending the people's rights, after an inquiry that would establish her rights and needs. Each of her children, legitimate or not, could collect a 365-franc pension until he was eighteen. At the expense of the Commune, orphans would receive the education necessary 'to make their own way in society'.<sup>93</sup>

This was, as Thomas notes, 'an implicit recognition of the structure of the working-class family, as it really existed, outside the context of religious and bourgeois laws: the recognition of *unions libres* [free unions];<sup>94</sup> of the right of children, legitimate or natural, to subsistence, and the disappearance of the old *macula bastardiae* of Roman Law, Church, and Civil Code'.<sup>95</sup>

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91. Ibid.

92. Quoted in Eichner 2004, p. 64.

93. Thomas 2007, pp. 63–4.

94. This was a common form of marriage at the time among workers. Many members of the working class were unwilling or unable to pay the church-fees in order to marry, so they were not considered legally married according to the French state. Eichner 2004, p. 29.

95. Thomas 2007, p. 64.

During the Commune, women spoke in clubs, created a number of organisations as to better their position, ensured that all in the Commune had food, and helped to organise for defence. One of the most important of these women was Dmitrieff. Soon after coming to Paris from London, she helped create the women's organisation of the French section of the International, the Union des Femmes Pour la Défense de Paris et les Soins aux Blessés ('Union of Women for the Defence of Paris and Aid to the Wounded') in April 1871.<sup>96</sup> This organisation was 'one of the largest and most clearly delineated and effective organizations' of the Commune.<sup>97</sup> The agenda that Dmitrieff set for the Union des Femmes included 'reordering production relations into producer-owned cooperatives, ending the exploitative employer-laborer relationship, and attempting to eradicate intra-class and inter-gender conflicts regarding women's right to work'.<sup>98</sup>

The most important immediate goal of the organisation was to provide work to unemployed women during the siege.<sup>99</sup> While her plans during the Commune did not challenge the gendered division of labour, she did attempt to 'alter the social and economic value of women's work'.<sup>100</sup> Dmitrieff focused 'on the garment-related trades, which were known as and correspondingly devalued as "women's work," she endeavored to redirect control and economic benefit away from employers into the hands of producer/owner/workers. Dmitrieff intended to re-value these skills by giving women control over their own labor and the products of their production'.<sup>101</sup>

Because the Commune lasted for only 72 days, Dmitrieff was unable to carry out her long term goals of revaluing women's work. Her organisation did, however, provide work to many of the unemployed during this time, and also created a model for the future organisation of labour. Her actions, as well as those of many of the other women involved in the Commune, led at least some in France and in the International to rethink their positions on women. This became especially clear in the 1880 programme of the French Parti Ouvrier ('Workers' Party') where this group voted for a party-platform written by Marx and Jules Guesde that contained relatively strong provisions for the equality of women.

While women were involved to a significant extent in the Commune, Marx spends relatively little time on the role that women played in these events.

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<sup>96</sup> Thomas 2007, p. 70.

<sup>97</sup> Eichner 2004, p. 70.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

However, there are a few passages where Marx does discuss the women of the Commune. Marx claims that once the wealthy Parisian women left the city, the working-class women, who were the 'real women of Paris' became much more visible for who they really were:

The *cocottes*<sup>102</sup> had reformed the scent of their protectors – the absconding men of family, religion, and, above all, of property. In their stead, the real women of Paris showed again at the surface – heroic, noble, and devoted, like the women of antiquity. Working, thinking, fighting, bleeding Paris – almost forgetful, in its incubation of a new society, of the cannibals at its gates – radiant in the enthusiasm of its historic initiative!<sup>103</sup>

The proletarian women and other women, including lower-class prostitutes, who participated in the Commune understood that, while bourgeois men spoke of their support for family and property, their interests were very different to their own. Many Parisian women fought for the Commune because they saw that it could better protect their interests and lead in the direction of a new, more egalitarian society. Here, Marx makes an interesting reference to the women of antiquity. Given the context, Marx does not appear to be referring to the actual women in Greek and Roman societies, who were often highly oppressed, especially in Greece, where they were often not allowed to leave the home. Instead, Marx is likely referring to the mythical women such as Athena and other goddesses who, Marx would later argue, provided a partial model of freedom for the women of the time, who were far from being free. Here, the Parisian women were working for their own freedom and the regeneration of society.

In part, this was possible because of a significant decrease in crime in Paris during the Commune. While Marx does not state it directly, this allowed the women of the Commune a greater amount of freedom since they had less to worry about in terms of their personal safety:

Wonderful, indeed, was the change the Commune had wrought in Paris! No longer any trace of the meretricious Paris of the Second Empire... No more corpses at the morgue, no nocturnal burglaries, scarcely any robberies; in fact, for the first time since the days of February 1848, the streets of Paris were safe, and that without police of any kind. 'We,' said a member of the Commune, 'hear no longer of assassination, theft, and personal assault...'<sup>104</sup>

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102. Upper-class prostitutes or mistresses of the wealthy and powerful.

103. Marx 1996a, p. 194

104. Ibid.

Presumably, the same was also true of rape, although evidence is not available. However, this would change significantly as the Versaillais invasion commenced.

As the Versailles government's forces entered Paris and began to retake the city, the repression of the Commune tended to single out women. It was women who were most often accused of setting fires in the city's buildings during the last days of the Commune. While women did start some fires, as a strategic measure to ensure that the buildings could not be used by the Versaillais, there is no reason to assume that women were primarily responsible for this. The men of the Commune started a number of fires for the same reason, and it cannot be ruled out that the Versailles government's forces started a number of other fires.<sup>105</sup>

Women, and especially those working-class women who were forced into prostitution by their economic circumstances prior to the Commune, were likely targets. It was an issue not only of punishing those who had committed crimes, but also of setting an example. Many conservatives were concerned about women's participation in what they saw as man's world. For example, a news-article at the time pointed to 'women forgetting their sex and their gentleness to commit assassination, to poison soldiers, to burn and slay; little children converted into demons of destruction, and dropping petroleum into the areas of houses; soldiers in turn forgetting all distinctions of sex and age, and shooting down prisoners like vermin, now by scores and now by hundreds'.<sup>106</sup> 'Women's crimes were crimes against *femininity*', and they needed to be punished severely for their 'unnatural' behaviour in order to save society, according to these conservative authors.<sup>107</sup>

Marx challenged these critics who ridiculed the women involved in defending the Commune. While Marx saw those involved (both men and women) as historical subjects seeking to work out the conditions for a more equitable society, the critics saw their actions working against the natural order of things. The men and women of the Commune were merely criminals, and the women who attempted to fight at the barricades were especially troublesome:

In all its bloody triumphs over the self-sacrificing champions of a new and better society, that nefarious civilization, based upon the enslavement of labour, drowns the moans of its victims in a hue-and-cry of calumny, reverberated by a world-wide echo. The serene working men's Paris of the Commune is suddenly changed into a pandemonium by the blood-hounds of 'order' And what does this tremendous change prove to the bourgeois

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<sup>105</sup> Thomas 2007, p. 169

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Gullickson 1996, p. 178.

<sup>107</sup> Gullickson 1996, p. 178.

mind of all countries? Why, that the Commune has conspired against civilization! The Paris people die enthusiastically for the Commune in numbers unequalled in any battle known to history. What does that prove? Why, that the Commune was not the people's own government, but the usurpation of a handful of criminals! *The women of Paris joyfully give up their lives at the barricades and on the places of execution. What does this prove? Why, that the demon of the Commune has changed them into Megaeras and Hecates!*<sup>108</sup> The moderation of the Commune during two months of undisputed sway is equaled only by the heroism of its defence. What does that prove? Why, that for months the Commune carefully hid, under a mask of moderation and humanity, the blood-thirstiness of its fiendish instincts, to be let loose in the hour of its agony!<sup>109</sup>

Here, Marx is arguing, as in his 1868 letter to Kugelmann, that despite the views of most men, women are an important force for progressive change. Moreover, he reproaches the conservative critics for viewing women's defence of the Commune as 'unnatural'.

Despite the bloody repression of the Commune, Dmitrieff was able to escape Paris without notice and returned to Russia, where her role in the Commune was unknown because she again began using her real name, Tomanovskaya. While she largely stayed out of politics after this, other than some minimal involvement in failed conspiratorial plots in Russia, she did request Marx's help in a legal matter involving her husband. Marx helped Tomanovskaya's new husband, Mikhaïlovitch Davidovsky, find a lawyer to defend him from murder-charges. However, Davidovsky was convicted and sent to Siberia, where Tomanovskaya followed him.<sup>110</sup>

## After the Commune

### *'Critique of the Gotha Programme'*

While Marx did not write a great deal on what he thought a future socialist society would look like, his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Programme* provides

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108. Megaera, a Greek goddess, is best known for causing envy and jealousy, as well as punishing marital infidelity. While Hecate had primarily a positive role in Greek mythology as the guardian of the household and protector of the newly born, over time, she has come to be viewed primarily in her third role – the goddess of witchcraft. In this case, Marx appears to be referring to her role as a witch, alluding to the primarily negative depictions of the women of the Commune put forward by its detractors.

109. Marx 1996a, p. 202, emphasis added.

110. Thomas 2007, p. 211.



his clearest explication. This text was written in response to a proposed programme of the German Workers' Party. Marx sent these comments to Wilhelm Bracke in 1875, before the congress met, and it was later published in 1891.<sup>111</sup> Marx was very critical of the party-programme and saw it as a regression in the movement on a number of points, including its emphasis on issues of distribution instead of going deeper to transform the actual relations of production. This would not be a simple task, and would require a great deal of time and effort. A capitalist society could not go directly from capitalism to communism: an intervening, lower stage of communism would be necessary to adequately transform social relations.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to these more general discussions, Marx addresses gender in two places in these notes. The first example relates to Marx's discussion of the limited nature of the bourgeois concept of 'rights', and the place that they will have in the first phase of communism. The Gotha Programme speaks of the need for 'a just distribution of the return [from labour]' but, as Marx notes, just distribution can only be measured based on the form of society in question, and not in terms of abstract concepts of justice, since those in power will always claim that the present distribution is just.<sup>113</sup>

In terms of developing a programme for change, Marx posits that it is necessary to take into account the present conditions and the contradictory nature of society that will make change difficult. What must be kept in mind with regard to this programme is that: 'Here we are dealing with a communist society, not as it *has developed* from first principles, but on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society, hence in every respect – economically, morally, intellectually – as it comes forth from the womb, it is stamped with the birthmarks of the old society'.<sup>114</sup> Thus, any new system would be far from perfect in the beginning, especially in terms of any developed concept of rights.

One of the examples that Marx uses to discuss the problems with using the bourgeois concept of right involves the distribution of labour in the family, and how this could lead to unequal distribution overall:

Furthermore: one worker is married, another not, one has more children than another, etc. etc. Given equal productivity and hence an equal share in the socialized resources for consumption, one worker will in fact receive more than another, be richer than another. To avoid all these faults, rights would have to be unequal, instead of equal.<sup>115</sup>

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111 Marx 1975–2004k, p. 75.

112 Marx 1996b, p. 214.

113 Marx 1996b, p. 211.

114 Marx 1996b, p. 213.

115 Marx 1996b, p. 214.

As was noted in previous sections, Marx saw the need to involve all able-bodied adults, and, to some extent, children, in social production. If all were receiving equal remuneration for the amount of work that they put in, it is possible for there still to be an unequal distribution, if the family pooled their resources. Thus, here Marx appears to be pointing to the difficulties of using a capitalistic concept of rights and equal remuneration for a society that is beginning to be less based upon the abstract individual. This would conceivably change, however, in a more developed socialist society, where 'the limited horizon of bourgeois right [can] be wholly transcended, and society can inscribe on its banner: from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!'<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, since Marx is here dealing with a society that is in transition from capitalism to socialism, he may be indicating that domestic labour should be valued as well. While it may not have an exchange-value, since it is labour done in the home, it does have an important use-value. Someone has to be available to do the cooking and cleaning and raise the children. Those that live alone have to do these things in addition to their own labour in the public sphere. Thus, a married worker (potentially of either sex) would have an advantage in this regard, if the domestic partner received similar remuneration for domestic work. However, this too could be further socialised in a more developed socialist society, eliminating the inequality stemming from this arrangement. While Marx himself probably did not see the potential radical implications of this discussion, his comments certainly do not foreclose the possibility of a new, less gendered social division of labour in the home.

Marx also criticises the Gotha Programme for its vague provisions involving women's labour. This programme only calls for 'limitations on female and child labour'.<sup>117</sup> On this point, Marx argues: 'The standardization of the working day must already include limitations on female labour so far as this refers to the length of the working day, breaks, etc.; otherwise this can only mean the exclusion of female labour from branches of labour which are particularly injurious to the female body or are morally objectionable to the female sex. If that is what they meant, then they should have said so'.<sup>118</sup> Here, Marx notes that, in most cases, there is no reason to put specific provisions on women's labour, because they are just as capable of doing the work and do not require special provisions. While this may be the case with most work, there may be situations where certain work may be harmful to women, and thus they should be prohibited from engaging in this work. Marx remains somewhat

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116 Marx 1996b, p 215.

117 Marx 1996b, p 225.

118. Ibid.

ambivalent on this point, however. It remains unclear whether, for Marx, this would be a justifiable reason for regulating women's work. As discussed in the previous chapter, Marx saw morality as based upon the mode of production to at least some extent, but he never elucidates whether work that may be 'morally objectionable' for women in a capitalist society could become less so in a future society.

*Labour, nature, and wealth in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme'*

In what appears to be a return to his work in the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *Capital* on the question of the relationship between human labour and nature, Marx's opening lines of the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* criticise the statement that 'Labour is the source of all wealth and culture'.<sup>119</sup> Here, Marx makes the distinction between wealth (use-value) and capitalist surplus-value. Certainly, labour is the source of the surplus-value extracted by the capitalist, but only under capitalism is this considered wealth. Use-values, which can become wealth for all in society, are not solely based on labour: 'Labour is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use-values (and what else is material wealth?) as labour, which is itself only the expression of a natural power, human labour power'.<sup>120</sup> Here, as in the 1844 *Manuscripts* (see Chapter Two), Marx points to the reciprocal relationship between humanity and nature. There is no strong opposition between human labour and nature: instead, the two are essentially the same since human labour-power is itself a 'natural power'.

Far from being based upon a voluntarist stance regarding the relationship between nature and labour, Marx points to the dependence of humanity on nature: 'Only in so far as man acts as the proprietor of nature, the primary source of all the means and materials of labour, and treats nature as his own from the outset, does his labour become the source of use-values, and hence of wealth'.<sup>121</sup> Thus, while consciousness and intelligence are involved in the labour-process, there are still limits on humanity's ability to transform nature. Moreover, Marx again points out that humanity is not separate from nature. In the labour-process the individual 'treats nature as his own'. Here, as in his earlier writings, Marx attempts to overcome the nature/culture dualism by illustrating the interconnection between nature and society in the labour-process. While he never fully develops this with regard to women's

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119 Marx 1996b, p. 208.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

reproductive labour, such a project would not appear to be incompatible with his theory of society.

*'The Programme of the Parti Ouvrier'*

One of the texts written by Marx that seems to indicate that he saw women as a force for enacting social change was the 'Programme of the Parti Ouvrier', written in 1880. This text contains two major parts, the first of which was written solely by Marx, and the second co-authored by Jules Guesde and Marx with assistance from Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue and Engels.<sup>122</sup> The programme was adopted with some amendments later that year.<sup>123</sup> In a letter discussing this document, Marx writes: 'This very brief document in its economic section consists solely of demands that actually have spontaneously arisen out of the labour movement itself. This is in addition to an introductory passage where the communist goal is defined in a few lines'.<sup>124</sup> Here, Marx seems to be pointing to the importance of the Paris Commune in helping to formulate this programme. Furthermore, this programme contains demands for two very different economic and political situations. The preamble refers to what a communist society after the overthrow of capitalism would look like. The body of the programme, however, refers to reforms possible within capitalism.

The authorship of specific parts of the second section is less clear, since it was drafted by both Marx and Guesde with the assistance of others.<sup>125</sup> However, after the programme was agreed upon, Guesde began to question the reforms called for in the minimum-sections. He saw these as too reformist, and claimed that the rejection of these reforms would 'free the proletariat of its last reformist illusions and convince it of the impossibility of avoiding a workers [17]89'.<sup>126</sup> While Marx saw these reforms as creating the conditions for a strong workers' movement, Guesde and others saw these reforms as having the potential of co-opting the workers.

While generally calling for revolutionary action in order to gain control of the means of production, the preamble also makes a relatively strong statement with regard to the position of women within a future socialist society: 'That the emancipation of the class of producers involves all mankind, without distinction of sex or race'.<sup>127</sup> While this is a relatively vague statement that could potentially be interpreted in a number of ways, both the text of the

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122 Marx 1992, p. 376.

123 Ibid.

124 Marx 1975–2004, p. 44.

125 Marx 1992, 376.

126 Moss 1976, p. 107.

127 Marx 1992, 376.

minimum-demands as well as the fact that this is the first line of the preamble indicate the importance of emancipating the entire working class, including women. Moreover, his support for women's rights in countries without a strong Proudhonist movement, such as Great Britain and the United States, seems to illustrate that, while Marx may have included this to keep Proudhonists out, this was probably not the only reason.

The minimum-demands, however, are much more specific and contain very strong provisions that primarily benefit women. For example, the section describing the political demands of the Party includes not only provisions for more rights in the public sphere, such as full freedom of the press and the abolition of laws against the First International, but also calls for the 'Abolition... of all the articles of the Code [Napoléon] establishing the inferiority of the worker in relation to the boss, and of *woman in relation to man*'.<sup>128</sup> This was a particularly significant demand, since the *Code Napoléon* was especially oppressive for married women. As de Beauvoir notes:

The wife owed *obedience* to her husband, he could have her condemned to solitary confinement for adultery and get a divorce from her, if he killed her, caught in the act, he was excusable in the eyes of the law, whereas the husband was liable to penalty only if he brought a concubine into the home, and it was in this case only that the wife could obtain a divorce from him. The man decided where to live and had much more authority over the children than did the wife, and, except where the wife managed a commercial enterprise, his authorization was necessary for her to incur obligations. Her person and property were both under rigorous marital control.<sup>129</sup>

Thus, Marx and the Parti Ouvrier were calling for an end to the laws which allowed men to dominate women in the domestic sphere.

Furthermore, the economic section lists a number of policies that would benefit all workers such as a six-day work-week of a maximum of eight hours a day, a legal minimum-wage to be based on the price of food and determined by a workers' council,<sup>130</sup> accident-insurance for employees, and greater workers' control in the factories.<sup>131</sup> Included in these more general policies were policies that would primarily benefit women, such as societal responsibility for care of the elderly and disabled, both of which – then as now – tend to be

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128 Marx 1880, emphasis added and Marx 1965, p. 1538.

129 De Beauvoir 1989, p. 111.

130 Marx questioned the effectiveness of such a provision, however, which he referred to in a letter to Sorge as 'trivialities which Guesde found it necessary to throw to the French workers notwithstanding my protest... (I told him "If the French proletariat is still so childish as to require such bait, it is not worth while drawing up any program whatever")' Marx 1975–2004, p. 44.

131 Marx 1880 and Marx 1992, p. 377.

the responsibility of women. However, the most important of these was a provision for 'Equal pay for equal work, for workers of both sexes'.<sup>132</sup> Unlike many later Marxists, Marx clearly saw the issue of women's rights as important to the workers' movement, and did not think that all of these issues could wait until after the revolution.

These measures are all the more impressive considering France's relatively sexist politics of the time, which included the socialists. A number of French socialists were influenced by Proudhonism, which was deeply sexist.<sup>133</sup> For example, the French delegation to the 1866 conference of the International in Brussels published a pamphlet stating that 'without the family, the woman has no reason for being on earth' and 'if the devotion to public issues, if the preoccupation with collective interests are qualities in a man, they are an aberration in a woman, one which science has long proven lead to inevitable consequences for the child: wilting, rickets, and finally impotence'.<sup>134</sup> This type of argument, involving women's different 'nature' and thus relegating her to the domestic sphere, was common among most groups in French society.

## Conclusion

As with his more theoretical writings, in his political activities Marx was also committed to improving the position of women in production and in society in general. In a number of cases, Marx's discussion was somewhat ambivalent, as it was in certain sections of *Capital*. However, his position over time changed significantly, as women became more involved in the workers' movement. This can be seen especially in his work for the International, where he argued in favour of women's equality within the movement and spoke on the effects of machinery on the family and women's position overall. Additionally, Marx recognised the importance of women's economic and social demands during the Paris Commune, supporting the incorporation of these demands into the programme of the French Workers' Party. His support for women continued after the events of the Commune, and he pushed members of the International to include women in their membership and include primarily women's demands in their programmes as well.

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132 Marx 1992, 377.

133 Exceptions include women's rights activists such as Flora Tristan in the 1840s and Communardes André Léo, Paule Mink and Louise Michel. There was also some support for women's rights from male Communards Benoît Malon, Léo Frankel, and Eugène Varlin. Eichner 2004, p. 43.

134 Quoted in Eichner 2004, p. 38.

## Chapter Five

### **Patriarchy, Women's Oppression and Resistance: Comparing Marx and Engels on Gender and the Family in Precapitalist Societies**

In the last few years of his life, Marx returned to two important themes that he had studied in his earlier works: precapitalist societies and gender. While Marx was not able to write up and publish his research on these topics, his notebooks provide a great deal of insight into his thinking during this period. Marx took extensive notes on a number of anthropological studies including those of Lewis Henry Morgan, Henry Sumner Maine, Ludwig Lange, John Budd Phear, John Lubbock, and Maxim Kovalevsky. This chapter will address only the first of these, and compare Marx's notes to Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in which Engels consulted Marx's notebooks on Morgan. The following chapter will discuss Marx's notes on Maine and Lange as they relate to gender and the family.

It appears that, in these notes, Marx was returning to some of the issues that he raised in the *Grundrisse*, especially in the section 'Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations'. Particularly important was the way in which the development of property facilitated the individuation of human beings. Marx, to some extent, does address this issue and the particular forms that individuation takes with regard to gender and the family. These notes suggest that, for Marx, the development of class-society and women's oppression are part of the same historical process, but in a

somewhat different way from that described later by Engels in his *The Origin of the Family Private Property and the State*. For Marx, there had been no 'world-historic defeat of the female sex'. The condition of women in society is and has varied. This is just as true of the time before the introduction of patriarchy as in the period of patriarchy. Instead of seeing this development in a linear way, Marx appears to have been working out a dialectical history of these processes.

This chapter will examine Marx's notes from Morgan and provide an analysis of the general direction that he seems to have been taking with them. Before delving into a discussion of Marx's notes themselves, I will provide a short discussion on the history of the notebooks and their relation to Engels's *The Origin of the Family*. After a brief overview of Morgan's basic argument, I will discuss the major points of Marx's notes on Morgan as they relate to gender and the family. Finally, I will compare Marx and Engels's views on these issues in light of feminist criticisms of their work.

### **Marx's notebooks and the history of Engels's *The Origin of the Family***

Of all Marx's notes taken in the 1880s, those on Morgan's *Ancient Society* have become among the most significant. After Marx's death, Engels found this notebook and eventually used it, along with his own reading of Morgan, to write *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. In a letter to Kautsky on 16 February 1884, Engels discussed the importance of the book:

There is a *definitive* book – as definitive as Darwin's was in the case of biology – on the primitive state of society; once again, of course, Marx was the one to discover it. It is Morgan's *Ancient Society*, 1877. Marx mentioned it, but my head was full of other things at the time and he never referred to it again which was, no doubt, agreeable to him, wishing as he did to introduce the book to the Germans *himself*. I can see this from his very exhaustive extracts. Within the limits set by his subject, Morgan rediscovers for himself Marx's materialist view of history, and concludes with what are, for modern society, downright communist postulates. The Roman and Greek gens is, for the first time, fully elucidated in the light of that of savages, in particular the American Indians, thus providing a firm basis for the history of primitive times. If I had the time to spare, I would work up the material, together with Marx's notes, for the feuilleton of the *Sozialdemokrat* or for the *Neue Zeit*, but it's out of the question.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Engels 1975–2004a, p. 103.



It is important to note, here, that Engels makes it clear that Marx took extensive notes on Morgan's book, and not that these notes were a short abstract as Engels was later to imply in his preface to the book. Furthermore, as will be seen below, the idea that Morgan 'rediscovers for himself Marx's materialist view of history' belongs to Engels, and cannot be found in Marx's notebooks.

Engels decided that this material was important enough to work on, and, in the preface to *The Origin of the Family*, he stated that he saw this as a sort of bequest from Marx: 'No less a man than Karl Marx had made it one of his future tasks to present the results of Morgan's researches in the light of the conclusions of his own – within certain limits, I may say our – materialistic examination of history, and thus to make clear their full significance'.<sup>2</sup> But while Engels states that he is attempting to explicate Marx's views on Morgan's *Ancient Society* and on gender and the family more generally, he also realises the limitations of his study: 'My work can offer only a meager substitute for what my departed friend no longer had the time to do. But I have the critical notes which he made to his extensive extracts from Morgan, and as far as possible I reproduce them here'.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the almost canonical status it has received among many Marxists, it is likely that the book was not intended to be viewed as such by Engels. As noted above, this was primarily Engels's effort to provide to a German audience a critical review of Morgan's work, rather than an attempt to put forward a fully developed theory of the relationship between class and gender. Moreover, it was written up very quickly with the proviso that he would return to it at a later date – something that he never did.<sup>4</sup> Thus, even Engels probably did not view this as the final statement on the relationship between class and gender.

While Engels clearly does attempt to follow Marx and explicate his views, with the publication of Marx's notebooks on Morgan, it is clear that he is only partially successful. Dunayevskaya, for example, draws attention to how little Engels actually cited Marx's notes, and argues that he was only able to reflect Marx's views to a limited extent:

To what extent is Marx's 'spirit' reflected in Engels's own work, *The Origin of the Family*, which he had likewise considered a 'bequest' of Marx? Now that we finally have a transcription of Marx's *Etymological Notebooks*, we can see for ourselves. It is not a quantitative question, though that is vast in itself. Marx's excerpts from and commentaries on Morgan's work alone

<sup>2</sup> Engels 1986, p. 35

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Barrett 1986, p. 12

numbered no less than ninety-eight pages, whereas Engels's quotation from the Abstract numbered but a few paragraphs. Nor is it a matter that Engels ignored other anthropological works that had been summarized: Maine, Phear, and Lubbock. No, the serious, overwhelming, if not bewildering, fact leaps out in the sharp differences between Engels's *The Origin of the Family* and Marx's Notebooks, whether these relate to primitive communism, the Man/Woman relationship, or, for that matter, the attitude to Darwin.<sup>5</sup>

To my knowledge, there has been no study produced which discusses Marx's position on gender and the family in these notebooks in any significant detail.<sup>6</sup>

### Separating Marx from Engels

Most feminist discussions of Marxism have focused on the work of Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, a book-length treatment of gender and the family, under the assumption that Marx and Engels had the same views. It is true that Engels wrote a systematic study of gender and the family, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, whereas Marx's writings on the topic are scattered throughout his work. There is no reason, however, to assume that their views are the same or that Engels's views are superior to those of Marx. In fact, it has been frequently argued in the contemporary literature on Marxism that Engels's work tended to be more determinist, less dialectical and more monistic than that of Marx.

In recent decades, there has been a tendency in Marxist scholarship to view Marx somewhat or completely separately from Engels. The leading political theorist Terrell Carver, for example, discusses differences between the two in their views on dialectics and Engels's less philosophical and more scientific understanding of society and social change.<sup>7</sup> Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, however, offers the first critique of Engels as a mecha-

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<sup>5</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 179.

<sup>6</sup> Dunayevskaya 1985 and 1991 has written on Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks*, but did not engage in a full and systematic treatment of this topic. Additionally, Krader 1972 discusses these notes in detail in his introduction, but does not address Marx's positions on gender; nor does he say much about the differences between Marx and Engels. Rich 2001 briefly discusses these notebooks in relation to gender, and Rosemont 1989 does so as well, but without contrasting Marx and Engels. Smith 2002 argues that Marx sought to expand his analysis from Western Europe to precapitalist societies in order to understand what the capitalist system would be facing as it expanded through colonialism. Anderson 2010 briefly discusses gender and argues that Marx was attempting to theorise new forms of resistance to capitalism.

<sup>7</sup> Carver 1983.

nistic determinist.<sup>8</sup> Lukács elaborates a critique of Engels for his acceptance of the methods of natural science as 'praxis in the dialectical, philosophical sense'.<sup>9</sup> Instead of being the proper method for understanding politics and society, the scientific-empiricist model tends to abstract from society and ignore how different factors interact with each other: 'Scientific experiment is contemplation at its purest. The experimenter creates an artificial, abstract milieu in order to be able to observe undisturbed the untrammelled workings of the laws under examination, eliminating all irrational factors both of the subject and the object'.<sup>10</sup> Through the appropriation of the empirical model, Engels tends to only focus on one specific aspect of society, economics, at the expense of other important areas of study. This is especially true in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

Engels's acceptance of this model is particularly problematic, for Lukács, because it leaves little room for subjectivity:

Dialectics, he [Engels] argues, is a continuous process of transition from one definition into the other. In consequence a one-sided and rigid causality must be replaced by interaction. But he does not even mention the most vital interaction, namely the *dialectical relation between subject and object in the historical process*, let alone give it the prominence it deserves. Yet without this factor dialectics ceases to be revolutionary, despite attempts (illusory in the last analysis) to retain 'fluid' concepts. For it implies a failure to recognize that in all metaphysics the object remains untouched and unaltered so that thought remains contemplative and fails to become practical; while for the dialectical method the central problem is *to change reality*.<sup>11</sup>

While Engels did seek to correct the one-sided nature of causal explanations through the concept of identity of opposites, according to Lukács, he did not take this argument far enough. The identity of opposites is only one aspect of dialectics. Equally, if not more important is the 'dialectical relation between subject and object'. For Lukács, the subject and object are not discrete categories. Instead, they are dialectically related so that, in the same relationship, something can be both an active agent and an entity that is acted upon. Thus, the working class or any other social group is both subject to the social relations in which it exists, and also has the capacity in certain situations to act to change these conditions in a conscious manner.

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<sup>8</sup> Lukács 1971.

<sup>9</sup> Lukács 1971, p. 132.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Lukács 1971, p. 3.

The failure to see this relationship between subject and object can lead to problems in translating theoretical constructs into practice.<sup>12</sup> This is the case because separation of the subject and object implies the 'separation between method and reality, between thought and being'.<sup>13</sup> Lukács argues that theory tends toward either fatalism or voluntarism without this vital dialectical link between theory and practice.<sup>14</sup>

Surprisingly little research has been done in the area of separating out the views of Marx and Engels on gender and the family, however. In most cases, orthodox Marxists and others have concluded that there is no need to separate the two, since their views were almost identical. Carver, discussing Marx's political economy more generally, points out some of the major difficulties with this:

Once this shift of attention has taken place, the views of the later Engels have *in fact* come to obscure the tenets and indeed the importance of Marx's admittedly difficult critique of political economy, because Engels presented Marx's project and his important theoretical propositions as consistent with a materialism which he propounded. This materialism was defined (with certain ambiguities) in terms of Engels's view of natural science. He took natural science to be (potentially) universal in scope, inductive, causal and particularly concerned with the establishment of 'laws'. Thus by default Engels is granted the position he assumed – Marx's co-equal – in the role he adopted: 'scientific' theoretician. Both those 'conclusions' need examining; neither the word of Engels nor of commentators is sufficient to prove their truth. Moreover the assessment of the Marx-Engels relationship those 'conclusions' imply is profoundly ambivalent. If we take Engels's philosophizing to stand for Marx's critique, his determinism to stand for Marx's 'guiding thread', and his interpretative context to stand for Marx's own, then who was *really*, as Engels put it, the 'first violin'?<sup>15</sup>

Here, Carver points to significant methodological differences between the two. Engels adhered to a more positivistic and scientistic model of the social sciences than Marx, who adopted a more dialectical approach.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in

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<sup>12</sup> Lukács 1971, p. 4

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Carver 1983, p. xv

<sup>16</sup> Here I am departing somewhat from Carver 1983, who argued that Engels created and imposed a Hegelian dialectic on Marx's work (p. 117). While Carver is certainly right to argue that there were important methodological differences between Marx and Engels, he leaves out Marx's own indications that he was using his own version of Hegelian dialectics. Marx not only 'included a notion of dialectic as the specification of conflictual, development factors in analyzing social phenomena' as Carver

order to understand Marx's contribution, we must separate out Engels's commentary on Marx from Marx's work.

Manicas, following Carver, also sees significant epistemological differences between the two.<sup>17</sup> While Marx saw that there was 'truth in both idealism and materialism, and that his view, naturalism or humanism, was a resolution of supposed differences', for Engels 'one had to be either an idealist or a materialist'.<sup>18</sup> Engels was a strict materialist who saw theory as an almost completely mirror-like reflection of the world.<sup>19</sup> Engels's crudely materialist and scientific view of society, as compared to Marx's more dialectical and humanist view, will become evident in a comparison of their responses to Morgan's *Ancient Society*.

### *Marx, feminism and dialectics*

Before discussing Marx's notebooks as they relate to gender and the family, it is first important to briefly address Marx's dialectical method and its relationship to feminism. In addition to Dunayevskaya, at least two scholars have discussed the potential value of Marx's dialectic to feminist theorising: Jennifer Ring and Martha Gimenez.<sup>20</sup> While both have, to varying extents, separated themselves from Marx's conclusions on gender (Gimenez) and society as a whole (Ring), both make a strong case for some form of dialectic in gender-studies to overcome some of the limitations of both positivism and postmodernism. While I disagree that Marx's dialectic needs to be completely excised from all of his conclusions on gender, these authors make an important contribution by bringing up Marx's dialectic in the context of gender-studies.

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maintains (p. 114), but he employed dialectics because he saw that the real world was essentially dialectical. Marx only appeared to use an 'eclectic' methodology compared to Engels because Engels's dialectic was much more schematic and in some cases data had to be forced to fit a particular case. For Marx's own discussion on the importance of Hegel's dialectic, see especially 'The Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic' in his 1844 *Manuscripts*. For discussions of Marx's use of Hegelian dialectics in terms of gender, see Dunayevskaya 1985 and 1991. Furthermore, Lenin in his 'Hegel Notebooks' states: 'It is impossible fully to grasp Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, if you have not studied through and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, none of the Marxists for the past ½ century have understood Marx!!' Quoted in Anderson 1995, p. 65. Thus even Lenin saw a very strong influence from Hegel, and argues that Engels and other Marxists misunderstood Marx on the dialectic.

<sup>17</sup> Manicas 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Manicas 1999, pp. 62–3.

<sup>19</sup> Manicas 1999, p. 66.

<sup>20</sup> See Ring 1991 and Gimenez 2005.

Ring focuses on the potential of using dialectics to create a non-Marxist theory of gender and society.<sup>21</sup> Ring argues that it is important to separate out the Marx-Hegel dialectic from what she sees as the authoritarian political consequences of what is typically described as Marxist socialism. Uncomfortable with what she sees as the teleological nature of the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic, Ring seeks to separate the dialectic from the idealist substance of Hegel's thought and the materialist substance of Marx's thought, which she describes as 'minimalist dialectics'. In pragmatist fashion, Ring seeks to create a dehistoricised dialectic that does not assume any particular outcome in advance, unlike Hegel and Marx, who posited an historically-based dialectic that contained a movement in the direction of freedom. For Ring, their teleological frameworks contain at the very least a potential for authoritarianism, since the dialectical interplay of forces is cut off early in order to support the ideological positions of either Marx or Hegel.<sup>22</sup>

These differences with Marx and Hegel notwithstanding, Ring provides an excellent discussion on the need for dialectical thinking within feminist theory. Two of her arguments are especially important. Ring correctly points to the difficulty that both feminist and non-feminist theory and social science in general has had with the subject-object dichotomy. Historically, objectivity has been associated with the male and subjectivity with the female. This corresponds to another fundamental dichotomy where male qualities are perceived as good and female qualities as bad. Feminist theory, according to Ring, has unquestioningly adopted either subjectivity or objectivity as being superior, or ignored the categories of subjectivity and objectivity altogether. She finds both of these stances to be unacceptable, since 'accepting one term as more appropriate to women while rejecting the other is a dichotomizing move in itself, whose dangers are both political and philosophical'.<sup>23</sup>

While Ring acknowledges the gendered construction of subjectivity and objectivity, she argues that postmodern and deconstructivist thought, which favours subjectivity, 'surrenders too much'.<sup>24</sup> It has become too relativistic, since 'anything is possible in a deconstructed world, in a world where there is no standard for weighing the responsibility of an author against the responsibility of a reader [and]... it offers no basis, indeed, it self-consciously denies the very *possibility* of a solidly grounded alternative to the past'.<sup>25</sup> Thus, such a method largely removes the transformative possibility from feminist theory,

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<sup>21</sup> Ring 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Ring 1991, pp. 21–2.

<sup>23</sup> Ring 1991, p. 121.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ring 1991, p. 20.

since its relativism precludes the possibility of formulating a theoretical programme for change.

Ring further writes that the dialectic of Hegel and Marx offers an alternative to these two possibilities, however, since it challenges the static notion of objectivity and subjectivity without giving up on the concepts altogether:

The terms *subjectivity* and *objectivity* have meaning in dialectical thought, and at the same time are not ultimately separable from one another. They are more properly regarded as moments, aspects of the same phenomenon, each of which is descriptive and meaningful, but only in relation to the other. Objectivity is not an entity, it describes a relationship between people and the world. So does subjectivity.<sup>26</sup>

Thus Ring emphasises the movement inherent in dialectical thinking as well as the importance of seeing the world relationally, instead of as atomised parts of the whole. This at least allows for the possibility of moving beyond dichotomous thinking.

Second, Ring emphasises the importance of conflict within dialectics. History and human understanding of history is a process. Facts do not just exist outside the world. No knowledge is ever easily obtained nor is it final. Instead the 'dialectical method ... focuses on the challenges to boundaries that constitute the interaction between subject and object, and which result in "more" knowledge or, more accurately, in a changing perception of reality'.<sup>27</sup>

While Ring makes strong arguments for the need to bring back dialectics into feminist theory, she is less persuasive on the need for 'minimalist dialectics', stripped of the substantive historical, social and ontological content of both Marx and Hegel. She rightly criticises both Marx and Hegel for their lack of understanding of, and attention to, feminist issues. Neither Marx nor Hegel provides an adequate theory of gender-oppression, although Marx comes closer, as I argue in this work.

However, Ring creates her own dualism in attempting to extract the dialectical method from the conclusions of Hegel and Marx, arguing that 'there is no end point to a true dialectic, hence no ultimately essential anything, either material or ideal'.<sup>28</sup> Here, she is objecting to any formulation of essence or ultimate truth. For Ring, history can only exist 'as hindsight'.<sup>29</sup> She moves toward an almost completely socially constructed world, in which truth stems from a 'mutual understanding, recognition, agreement [that] may arise for moments

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<sup>26</sup> Ring 1991, p. 123

<sup>27</sup> Ring 1991, p. 23

<sup>28</sup> Ring 1991, pp. 191–2.

<sup>29</sup> Ring 1991, p. 188.

between people and in response to the material world'.<sup>30</sup> Thus, while she tries to avoid privileging either the material or ideal, in the end, she develops a form of dialectics that is based on an almost liberal variant of idealism.

In contrast to Ring's version of the dialectic, in both Hegel and Marx, the historical process was inseparable from the dialectical method itself. Hegelians and Marxists argue that this was the case, not because they imposed dialectics on history, but because the history of the idea or the history of humanity are, by their very nature, dialectical. As Louis Dupré writes in relation to Marx, the very nature of his method involves an interplay between the empirical world and consciousness:

The dialectical character of man's relation to nature is not accepted as a speculative *a priori*, existing prior to the concrete relation itself and giving it its final foundation. The dialectic is to be *discovered empirically* in the real relation – it is a *reality*, and not an ideal relation which becomes real. The dialectical relation is an ultimate fact which requires no ulterior, ideal foundation and which cannot be reduced to a further, unifying principle (such as Hegel's self-developing Spirit)<sup>31</sup>

This contrasts with Ring's view of Marx's dialectic as teleological. Dupré notes that, because of the dialectical nature of Marx's method, it is impossible to separate the empirical and theoretical:

Since the dialectic for Marx is a primary fact, one might take its philosophical formulation to be a mere generalization of empirical observations, rather than an *a priori* principle of explanation. But to do so would be to destroy the dialectic itself. For it is as a conscious and free being that man is dialectically opposed to nature; consciousness, therefore, must have as much impact upon nature as nature has upon consciousness. By making the dialectical principle into a purely empirical observation of a fact, one reduces one term of the dialectic, consciousness, to an epiphenomenon of the other term, nature. The dialectic then loses its antagonistic character and ceases to exist. Marx himself pointed this out when he rejected Feuerbach's 'materialism' precisely because it did not allow any reciprocal action between man and nature.<sup>32</sup>

The necessary condition for this method to remain valid is that it must maintain 'a vital rapport with human action'.<sup>33</sup> Thus, as Lukács argues, the importance of Marx is not simply his conclusions, but the dialectical method

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<sup>30</sup> Ring 1991, p. 187.

<sup>31</sup> Dupré 1966, p. 214.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Dupré 1966, p. 216.



which involves a process of continually evaluating conclusions based on current conditions.<sup>34</sup> It is the importance of conscious human action and its collective movement in the direction of greater freedom that Ring minimises in her analysis of Marx. This leads her toward an agnostic dialectic that contains no explicit normative ground, and thus limits the ability of her theory to provide a positive ground from which to work toward change in society. This is especially true since she sees truth as primarily based on a process of coming-to-agreement on meaning through discourse. Here, any agreement reached, regardless of the power-arrangements that allowed this consensus to occur, would equal a moment of truth. Certainly, this is subject to change, but Ring downplays the material elements that influence these achieved moments of truth and how they would likely benefit those in power. This is especially true since there can be no appeal to some minimal form of historical directionality.

Despite these difficulties, Ring's work remains important since she systematically explores Marx's and Hegel's dialectic from a feminist standpoint. She illustrates the importance of the dialectical interrelationship between subjects and objects, as well as the significance of a methodology that focuses on movement and discontinuity, rather than stasis and continuity, for feminism as an emancipatory project. This is something that many Marxists who have written on the dialectic, including Lukács, Dupré, Marcuse and Ollman, do not address to a significant extent in their discussion, at least in terms of gender.<sup>35</sup>

Another important feminist scholar who explores Marx's methodology in terms of its applicability to issues of gender is Martha Gimenez. While largely in agreement with the majority of feminist scholars who argue that Marx did not have much to say on gender and the family,<sup>36</sup> she points to important aspects in Marx's method that could be valuable to feminism, starting from the premise that 'as long as capitalism remains the dominant mode of production, it is impossible fully to understand the forces that oppress women and shape the relations between men and women without grounding the analysis in Marx's work'.<sup>37</sup> Gimenez argues that Marx's method is important for at least two reasons. First, Marx focuses on actual social relations and their changing nature, in contrast to static *a priori* formulations. This is especially important since a great deal of socialist-feminist literature has tended to rely on ahistorical abstractions of the categories of man and woman:

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<sup>34</sup> Lukács 1971, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> See Lukács 1971; Dupré 1966; Marcuse 1999; and Ollman 1971 and 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Gimenez 2005, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> Gimenez 2005, pp. 11–12.

In its various formulations, patriarchy posits men's traits and/or intentions as the cause of women's oppression. This way of thinking diverts attention from theorizing the social relations that place women in a disadvantageous position in every sphere of life and channels it towards men as the cause of women's oppression. But men do not have a privileged position in history such that, independent of social determinations, they have the foresight and power consciously to shape the social organization in their favor. Men, like women, are social beings whose characteristics reflect the social formation within which they emerge as social agents.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, it is necessary to view men's and women's consciousness of themselves and the world around them as something that is socially mediated, rather than given.

Second, Gimenez focuses on Marx's concept of abstraction which is also based on his relational view of society.<sup>39</sup> Gimenez argues that, for Marx, it is necessary to evaluate the immediately given and seemingly simple concepts like men, women, and family since even these simple categories are based on 'multiple historical conditions of possibility that cannot be grasped without further theoretical and historical analysis'.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, 'every abstraction or category of analysis captures only a moment or aspect of a complex totality; things are what they are because of their relationships with other things, which are not always visible to immediate perception but can be identified if, instead of taking for granted the empirically observable in itself, as all there is, we inquire instead about its conditions of possibility and change'.<sup>41</sup> Thus, Marx's method is especially amenable to a feminist understanding, since it seeks to historically deconstruct seemingly-given categories and looks for weakness in the system as a strategy for enacting change.

In a somewhat Althusserian vein, Gimenez points to the ways in which Marxist analysis can lead toward a redefinition of the problematic categories of man and woman. Marx's historical and relational analysis in other areas of society can be carried over into studies of gender and the family. While this is certainly an important analysis of Marx's method, Gimenez downplays the

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<sup>38</sup> Gimenez 2005, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Bertell Ollman 2003 is perhaps the best known for explicating Marx's use of abstraction – starting from the real world and moving toward the thought concept – as a means to analyse society. Moreover, these abstractions 'focus on and incorporate both change and interaction (or system) in the particular forms in which these occur in the capitalist era' (Ollman 2003, pp. 63–4), thus they are not static ahistorical concepts, but are instead changing and changeable. Ollman does not discuss the process of abstraction in terms of gender, however. For more on Marx's process of abstraction, see Ollman 2003, Chapter Five.

<sup>40</sup> Gimenez 2005, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Gimenez 2005, p. 16.

extent to which Marx actually began to carry this out in relation to gender and the family. While Marx's analysis was problematic in certain places, I argue that he began to formulate a theory of gender and the family that did not essentialise women, and at least tentatively began to discuss the interdependent relationship between class and gender, without fundamentally privileging either in his analysis.

Dunayevskaya has been one of the very few to have attempted to separate Marx's views on women from those of Engels. In much of her work, starting with *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, she makes a sharp distinction between Marx and those she describes as 'post-Marx Marxists', in which she includes Engels.<sup>42</sup> She argues that many Marxists, including Engels, have misinterpreted Marx's Marxism. A key difference that she finds between Marx and post-Marx Marxists, including Engels, was his emphasis on dialectics and especially human subjectivity:

There is but one dialectical conceptual framework, an indivisible whole which does not divide economics and politics from Subject: masses in motion – a living, feeling, thinking, acting whole. Therefore, in Marx's new continent of thought, history was not just 'economic periods' but masses *making* history. Because a single dialectical course determines the objective and subjective forces, the dialectic of Marx's philosophy of revolution allowed Marx's theory of history to transform historic narrative into historic Reason.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, unlike Engels, who as we will see, viewed impersonal economic and social forces as the prime movers of history in a one-sided manner, Marx also saw human subjects consciously struggling to change their circumstances.

For Dunayevskaya, this becomes especially clear when comparing Marx's and Engels's views on Morgan's work on prehistoric and ancient societies:

Whether Marx focused on the equality of women during primitive communism or on Morgan's theory of the gens, his point of concentration always remained that revolutionary praxis through which humanity self-developed from primitive communism to the period in which he lived. ... Marx was not hurrying to make easy generalizations, such as Engels's characterization of the future being just a 'higher stage' of primitive communism. No, Marx envisioned a totally new man, a totally new woman, a totally new life form (and by no means only for marriage) – in a word, a totally new society.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991.

<sup>43</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 119.

<sup>44</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991, pp. 185–6.

Thus, for Dunayevskaya, what separated Marx from Engels in their responses to Morgan's work was Marx's emphasis on self-development and new departures. While Engels tended to view Morgan's work from a deterministic standpoint, Marx dialectically traced the development of rank in the clan<sup>45</sup> and the changing position of women in these societies, in such a way that both objective and subjective forces were relevant. Moreover, Marx was able to view these early societies through the lens of the modern world, in such a way that he could remain both objective and critical about these societies. These early societies may have provided a vantage-point to begin to articulate a new society that was less individualistic and more communal. However, it would not simply be a return to the old with the addition of technology: instead, 'totally new' relations were necessary.

### Marx's notebooks in historical context

While an effort has been made in recent years to make available all of Marx's writings, there are still many that remain unpublished, including a number of his notebooks. This chapter will address Marx's notes on Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* which have been transcribed and published by Lawrence Krader.<sup>46</sup>

While these notes provide valuable insight to Marx's views on precapitalist societies and their respective gender-relations, very little scholarly research has been done in this area.<sup>47</sup> This has been the case for a variety of reasons. First, a number of scholars have undervalued the importance of this work. For example, David Ryazanov, the Russian scholar who first located these notebooks, along with many of Marx's early works which he did publish, seems not to have appreciated their importance:

This methodical and systematic way of working Marx retained until the end of his life. If in 1881–82 he lost his ability for intensive, independent intellectual creation he nevertheless never lost the ability for research. Sometimes, in reconsidering these Notebooks, the question arises: Why did

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<sup>45</sup> Here and below, I am using 'clan' rather than the older and less-frequently used term 'gens'.

<sup>46</sup> Krader 1972. Also included in Krader's *Ethnological Notebooks* are Marx's notes on John Budd Phear's *The Aryan Village*, John Lubbock's *The Origin of Civilization* and Henry Sumner Maine's *Lectures on the History of Early Institutions*.

<sup>47</sup> While these notes were published in 1972, prior to the significant revival of Marxism in feminist theory, very few feminists addressed these important notes. This is even the case with Leeb 2007, who looks at a number of Marx's other works in significant detail.

he waste so much time on this systematic, fundamental summary, or expend so much labor as he spent as late as the year 1881, on one basic book on geology, summarizing it chapter by chapter. In the 63rd year of his life – that is inexcusable pedantry. Here is another example: he received, in 1878, a copy of Morgan's work. On 98 pages of his very minuscule handwriting (you should know that a single page of his is the equivalent of a minimum of 2 2 pages of print) he makes a detailed summary of Morgan. In such a manner does the old Marx work.<sup>48</sup>

In part because of this type of thinking, Marx's notes on Morgan remained unpublished until 1972, while some of his other notes on anthropology have still not seen the light of day.<sup>49</sup>

*Contra* Ryazanov, I will argue that these notebooks contain some of his most creative attempts at working through the development of human society through the use of dialectics. While these are only notebooks, which mostly contain excerpts from the authors that he was researching, the general direction of his research can be hypothesised through analysis of both the comments that he adds at various points and the material that he chooses to excerpt from Morgan.

In addition to the lack of availability of these notebooks and the disdain that some scholars have shown for this work, there is one other major reason why little research has been done on these works. Marx, in the *Ethnological Notebooks*, wrote in a mixture of English, German, Greek and Latin. Thus, while Krader's transcription is a very significant contribution, these notes have remained somewhat inaccessible to those scholars without significant language-training. Currently, David Norman Smith is preparing a full English translation with significant annotation of these notes, and has generously allowed me to use them for this project.

### **Morgan's Ancient Society**

Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* strives to track the progress of society and its institutions from early human history to its advance into the period that Morgan refers to as 'civilisation' – the creation of the state in places such as Greece and Rome.<sup>50</sup> For Morgan, human relations began in the primal

<sup>48</sup> Ryazanov quoted in Dunayevskaya 1991, pp. 177–8.

<sup>49</sup> These 1879–82 notes on precapitalist societies will be published in their original language in the forthcoming *MEGA2 IV/27*. Many of these will also be published in English in Smith (forthcoming) and appeared earlier in their original languages in Krader 1972.

<sup>50</sup> Morgan 1877.

horde without much, if any, social organisation. Eventually, marriage-classes began to develop, and this culminated in the organisation of clans, social organisations based on kinship, first along the female and then the male line. Later, the introduction and development of property overthrew the clan – which was based on egalitarian principles – and the state took its place.

Morgan's model of development was primarily unilinear in nature. There were specific stages that every society had to go through in order to develop. While these stages could be made shorter through contact with more developed societies (as Morgan pointed out with respect to European influence on Native-American tribes),<sup>51</sup> these were still necessary stages in the evolutionary process that could not be skipped. All societies would follow the same evolutionary path, albeit at different speeds.<sup>52</sup> Thus, for Morgan, it was possible to see the Iroquois and other less-developed societies relatively unproblematically as reflections of the early history of European societies.

In terms of the family, Morgan describes five types. They are the consanguine, punaluan, syndyasmian (pairing family), patriarchal and monogamian. The earliest, the consanguine, refers to group-marriage where all brothers and sisters were married to each other.<sup>53</sup> The punaluan family involves marriage outside of the clan. Women are married to their sisters' husbands and men are married to their brothers' wives.<sup>54</sup> The syndyasmian family 'was founded upon marriage between single pairs, but without an exclusive cohabitation'.<sup>55</sup> The patriarchal family involves the 'marriage of one man with several wives' while the wives remain in seclusion.<sup>56</sup> Finally, the monogamian family is similar to that of the syndyasmian family, but with exclusive cohabitation.<sup>57</sup>

Marx took extensive notes on Morgan, copying much of the text. While most of his notes consist of direct quotes and paraphrases from Morgan's text, in a few places Marx makes his own comments as well. Marx seemed to agree with much of Morgan's argument, but, in a number of places, it is evident that he at least partially disagreed with some of Morgan's conclusions. One of the most significant of these involved Morgan's primarily unilinear model of development. Marx added some nuance to this and indicated that the development of society to the present was much more complex than Morgan could account for in his model. This is true in both Marx's discussion of the general development of society, as well as the position of women at various points.

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<sup>51</sup> Morgan 1877, p. 177.

<sup>52</sup> Morgan 1877, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Morgan 1877, p. 393.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Morgan 1877, p. 394.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

## Marx's notes on Morgan

Lawrence Krader provides the first significant discussion of Marx's notes on Morgan. Within his introduction to the transcription of some of Marx's notes on ethnology, Krader argues that Marx's notes on Morgan served at least three important purposes. First, Marx takes extensive notes and seems to appropriate, sometimes relatively uncritically, Morgan's views on the basic development of human societies from collectivities, which, in their highest form were based upon the clan, through to the development of private property and the state.<sup>58</sup> However, Marx was much more critical of Morgan's work than Engels: 'Marx was generally favorable to Morgan's work; he did not reach Engels' verdict that *Ancient Society* is an epoch-making work, and that Morgan's "rediscovery of the precedence of the matriarchal over the patriarchal gens has the same significance for prehistory that Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology and Marx's theory of surplus value has for political economy"'.<sup>59</sup>

Second, Marx's appropriation of Morgan's argument of the existence of the clan, rather than the patriarchal family, in the earliest societies led him, in later notes, to use Morgan's work as a baseline from which to develop his critique of others who held patriarchal assumptions such as Maine, Niebuhr, Grote, and Mommsen.<sup>60</sup> Third, Morgan's text began to offer Marx some insight into what a less individualist and more collectivist society could look like.<sup>61</sup> This was far from an uncritical acceptance of primitivism: rather, a postcapitalist society would be different, at least to the extent that human-beings would play a much more important role as subjects,

Marx applied Morgan's view that in the ancient collectivities there existed the characteristics of society which man must reconstitute if he is to overcome the distortions of his character in the civilized condition. Marx made it clear, as Morgan did not, that this process of reconstitution will take place on another level than the old, that it is a human effort, of man for and by himself, that the antagonisms of civilization are not static or passive, but are comprised of social interests which are ranged for and against the outcome of the reconstitution, and this will be determined in an active and dynamic way.<sup>62</sup>

In her discussion of Marx's notebooks on ethnology, Dunayevskaya focuses on their dialectical structure. This was especially true in terms of his

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<sup>58</sup> Krader 1972, pp. 8–11.

<sup>59</sup> Krader 1972, p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Krader 1972, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> Krader 1972, p. 14.

discussion of primitive communism, where he focused on duality, rather than equality within the primitive commune, 'Just as there was conquest, even when the commune was at its height, and the beginning of slavery when one tribe defeated another, so there was the beginning of commodity exchange between communes as well as emergence of conflict within the gens. All these conflicts coalesced during the dissolution, which is why Marx's Notebooks keep stressing the duality in primitive communism'.<sup>65</sup> While primitive communal societies were theoretically based on the equality of all members, conquest, slavery and the beginning of the trade of goods illustrated another side to the clan, as well as the potential for dissolution.

For Dunayevskaya, these notebooks illustrate both the continuity in Marx's thinking and the further development of his ideas, 'What was new in these last writings from Marx's pen is that, on the one hand, he was returning to his first discovery of a new continent of thought when he singled out the Man/Woman relationship [in the 1844 *Manuscripts*] as the most revealing of all relationships; and, on the other hand, he was developing so new a concept of "revolution in permanence" that, in 1882, he was projecting something as startling as the possibility of revolution coming in backward lands ahead of the advanced countries'.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Dunayevskaya sees these notes as a return to the importance of the 'Man/Woman relationship', in an attempt to further concretise his earlier more abstract formulation. Dunayevskaya, like Engels, saw gender as one of the most important elements in Marx's notes. This is in contrast to other more recent work on the topic that tends to play down the gender-component, such as Krader and Smith.<sup>65</sup> These notes, as was true of all of his work, were based upon his dialectical understanding of human self-development.

Smith puts Marx's notes on ethnology into context, based on the politics of the time.<sup>66</sup> Thus, he sees Marx's notes as the beginning stage of an effort to gain significant standing in the incipient socialist movement, as against more authoritarian and deterministic elements, 'The embattled socialist labor movement, which dates from the founding of the International in 1864 and the Paris Commune of 1871, was still very young. Marx sought to influence this movement on two fronts: politically, by opposing statism in the name of the radical democracy of the Commune; and economically, by defending and extending the analysis of capitalism that he had presented in *Capital*, volume 1'.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 184

<sup>64</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 194

<sup>65</sup> See Krader 1972 and Smith 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Smith 2002

<sup>67</sup> Smith 2002, p. 75.



Not all of Marx's motivation for this research was political, however. Marx was also very aware of the changing nature of capitalism and its need to expand into those regions without previous capitalist penetration. Thus, Marx sought to expand his knowledge beyond Europe, to non-Western societies that would likely soon face capitalist expansion. Knowledge of these societies would give Marx new insight into what capitalism would face as it expanded into these societies:

Now he needed to know concretely, in exact cultural detail, what capital could expect to confront in its global extension. So it should not be surprising that Marx chose to investigate non-Western societies at precisely this point. Euro-American capital was speeding into a world dense with cultural difference. To understand this difference, and the difference it makes *for capital*, Marx needed to know as much as possible about noncapitalist social structures. ... Thus, the newly globalizing social system – which Marx called the *Warenwelt*, or 'commodity world' – was fated to collide with noncapitalist worlds of many kinds in its outward odyssey.<sup>68</sup>

Anderson addresses Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* in the context of his overall theory, and argues that these notebooks indicate an attempt to expand his study of political economy outside of western Europe in order to better understand the resistance that capitalism would face in its expansion: 'Marx's 1880–1882 notebooks were concerned not so much with the origins of social hierarchy in the distant past, as with the social relations within contemporary societies at the edges of capitalist globalization'.<sup>69</sup> Now that Marx had worked out the general laws of capitalist development in its purest form, he felt that he needed to delve into the possible forms of resistance that could halt, or at least in some way alter, the development of capitalism. Marx certainly did view capitalism as a dominant force that could impose vast changes on other societies due to its powerful generalising nature, but capitalism was not an insuperable force. Precapitalist societies offered one possible form of resistance to capitalism's universalising nature. Therefore, Marx would need to have a greater understanding of these societies if he was to understand the future development of capitalism.

### *The dialectics of the family*

In contrast to those feminist scholars that tend to see Marx's views on the family as static, ahistorical and biologicistic, I will attempt to show that his

<sup>68</sup> Smuth 2002, pp. 79–80.

<sup>69</sup> Anderson 2010, p. 201.

notes on Morgan, at least to some extent, point to a more dynamic view of the family as a changing and changeable social institution. Instead of the static and causal model that Marx appears to posit in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, relying on the (economic) base/superstructure model, here Marx seems to argue that the base is much more diverse than the economic elements of the mode of production:

'The family [represents an] active principle. [It] is never stationary, [but] passes from a lower form into a higher one... *Systems of consanguinity*, on the contrary, are passive, recording the progress made by the family at long intervals apart, and only changing radically when the family has radically changed.' (Just as things stand for political, religious, juridical, philosophical systems in general.)<sup>70</sup>

Here, instead of the purely economic being primary, Marx posits the material base more generally as including all practice-based social institutions, including the family. In this case, the superstructure would contain the law, religion and other ideologically-based systems. Regardless of whether or not one views the base/superstructure model as more dialectical, and thus based on interaction of the two, or in a more causal fashion, this seems to point to a greater emphasis on the family as an active agent in history.

In a number of places, Marx criticises those scholars that studied ancient societies but were unable to see the clan as a real social institution, since they viewed the patriarchal family as the foundational unit of society. For example, Marx criticises Grote's view that clan-organisation was only a myth:

'But the humbler gentes had their common rites' (odd, is it not, Mr. Grote?) 'and common superhuman ancestor and genealogy, as well as the more celebrated' (how very strange this is on the part of humbler gentes: Is it not, Mr. Grote?) 'The scheme and ideal' (Dear Sir, not ideal, but carnal, Germanice fleshly) 'basis was the same in all'... (Since the interconnection of the gentes, especially with the dawn of monogamy, has been pushed into the distance & past reality [it] appear[ed] reflected in a mythological fantasy-image, hence the conformist philistines have concluded, & keep concluding, that the fantasy genealogy really created the gentes!)<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Marx 1972, p. 112. Here and below I am using Smith's unpublished translation, and for the most part following his formatting of the text. In block-quotes, quotation-marks refer to sections in which Marx is quoting Morgan directly. Quoted text without quotation-marks or text in angled brackets refers to Marx's additions or paraphrases. Square-brackets are the editor's additions. All italics are Marx's emphasis, unless otherwise indicated. The page-numbers from Krader's transcription have been included for reference-purposes.

<sup>71</sup> Marx 1972, p. 202.

Marx, in contrast to Grote, points to the material nature of the clan, rather than seeing it as an ideal structure that eventually created the real clan. Grote and a number of other scholars could not see this, however, since their ideology of patriarchy and monogamy 'pushed...[the gentes] past reality [and] [thus] appear[ed] [to be] reflected in a mythological fantasy-image'.

While Marx was somewhat sympathetic to Johann Bachofen and his theory of mother-right, he was also critical of some of Bachofen's assumptions about these ancient families. This comes out most clearly in a discussion in Marx's notes on the family in ancient-Greek society during the transition to monogamy:

*Monogamy among Greeks probably not earlier than Upper Status of Barbarism.*  
So pragmatically, and so much like a true German pedant does Bachofen himself interpret this matter, we see from the following passage:

*'For before the time of Cecrops the children ... had only a mother, no father; they were of one line. Bound to no man exclusively, the woman brought only spurious' (!) 'children into the world. Cecrops' (!) '[first] made' (!) 'an end to this condition of things; led the lawless (!) union of [the] sexes back' (!) 'to the exclusivity of marriage, gave ... the children a father' (!) '& a mother' (!) '& thus ... made them go from [one line] unilateres < - > [two lines] bilateres.'*  
(Made them unilateres in male line of descent!)<sup>72</sup>

Here, Marx appears to question a number of Bachofen's points through his use of the parenthetical exclamation-mark. Marx notes at least three problems with Bachofen's statements. First, Marx points to the inaccuracy of speaking of 'spurious children' or 'lawless unions' in these early societies. Instead, the recognition of legitimate children was based on the customs common at the time. It is inaccurate to place the standard of law in modern societies as the sole standard by which to judge earlier societies. Second, Marx takes issue with Bachofen's idea that monogamy 'gave... the children a father and a mother'. Biologically speaking, children had always had two parents; however, monogamy changed the social relationships involved. In contrast to earlier systems, the parents – and especially the father – began to play a more exclusive role in their children's lives relative to other members of the community. Third, Marx criticises Bachofen for his statement that the children under monogamy belonged to both the family of the father and the mother. Instead, Marx argues, the child joined the male line of descent. It was much later before the women's family would regain any rights *vis-à-vis* the child.

<sup>72</sup> Marx 1972, p. 236.

In addition to a general statement on the place of the family in understanding history and his critiques of other scholars for their failure to understand other, earlier types of families, Marx also incorporates into his notes Morgan's view that the family can evolve further: 'As the monogamian family has improved greatly since the commencement of civilization, and very sensibly in modern times, it must be supposable that it is capable of still further improvement *until the equality of the sexes is attained*. Should the monogamian family in the distant future fail to answer the requirements of society, assuming the continuous progress of civilization, it is impossible to predict the nature of its successor'.<sup>73</sup> Marx emphasises, through his use of underlining, the need and possibility for the 'equality of the sexes [to be] attained'.

### *Slavery, the patriarchal family, and monogamy*

In addition to his general discussions of the individuation and the transformation of the family that takes place in early societies, Marx focuses a great deal on Morgan's treatment of the patriarchal family and its relation to slavery. While Morgan describes in great detail the characteristics of the patriarchal family, there is very little discussion of how this form of family relates to his general theory of development. Marx notes the few points that Morgan makes in this regard, and expands this discussion to include the outlines of his own theory of change.

Marx sees the destruction of the clan, the development of property, and the development of slavery as all essential to the development of the monogamous family. Here, Marx develops in more detail his and Engels's argument from *The German Ideology* that slavery 'is latent in the family'.<sup>74</sup> Slavery begins in the clan with the taking of women and children as captives during war, or by purchasing women from other tribes:

Once the gens 'had ... fully developed itself & exerted its full influence upon society, wives became scarce in place of their former abundance, because <the gens> tended to contract the size of the punaluan group, and finally to overthrow it. The syndyasmian family was gradually produced within the punaluan, after the gentile organization became predominant over ancient society.' As the syndyasmian family 'began to appear and <the> punaluan groups to disappear ... wives came to be sought by purchase and capture ... While <originating> in the punaluan group,' the gentile organization burst the bounds of this, its birthplace.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Marx 1972, p. 124.

<sup>74</sup> Marx and Engels 1998, p. 38.

<sup>75</sup> Marx 1972, p. 112.

Before, when marriage-restrictions were more minimal, there were many more potential partners available for both men and women, but as marriage-restrictions came into effect, this limited the number of eligible potential partners available. Marriageable women (and presumably men as well) then became more scarce. Since men were primarily responsible for hunting, and these weapons could potentially be used to capture women as well, men likely gained additional power over their choice of a partner.

Moreover, the capture of women had the potential of creating rank within the clan, although the presence of women from outside of the tribe is not in itself enough to introduce differential status into the clan. This introduced a foreign element into the clan that did not necessarily have to be incorporated equally into the otherwise-egalitarian clan, although adoption was an acceptable practice. Those adopted would have the same rights and obligations as those who were born into the clan,<sup>76</sup> thus their status would be no different than other members of the community. Therefore, the adoption of people within the clan could not in itself lead to the introduction of rank into society.

However, there could be a significant difference when women were bought or captured. This is especially true in those societies without matrilineal clans. As Marx and Morgan note, the clan is very different to, and incompatible with, the modern family, since the family-unit is always half-inside and half-outside of the clan.<sup>77</sup> In a patrilineal clan, the men would remain inside their own clan, and their children would be born into their clan. The wife would remain outside of this clan, and her daughters' children would be born into the clan of their father. When women left their clan to start a family, they would remain in their own clan, and not transfer to that of their husband. Thus, they were never fully incorporated into the clan, which could potentially allow for rank to enter into a formally egalitarian society.

Initially, the influence of rank was mitigated to some extent, since it involved only the women who were captured as wives and not as slaves: 'In seeking wives, they did not confine themselves to *their own, nor even* [to] *friendly tribes*, [but] *captured them by force from hostile tribes*; hence *Indian usage to spare the lives of female captives, while the males were put to death*'.<sup>78</sup> Later, as property developed and status began to become a factor in clan-society, the capture of men for use as slaves became more common.<sup>79</sup> This was largely due to the increased need for labour for agricultural purposes. The introduction

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<sup>76</sup> Morgan 1877, pp. 80-1.

<sup>77</sup> Marx 1972, p. 119.

<sup>78</sup> Marx 1972, p. 117.

<sup>79</sup> Morgan 1877, p. 80.

of larger-scale agriculture, as well as status-differentiation, led to the need for a new form of society. While the state and the monogamous family would be two of the institutions that would become most common in 'civilisation', social and material development was not yet great enough to move directly to these forms. Instead, the patriarchal family would be an intermediary form, where economics and politics as well as public and private were not yet seen as completely separate spheres:

What essentially characterizes this form of the family: 'Organization of a number of person [sic], bond and free, into a family, under paternal power, for the purpose of holding lands, and for the care of flocks and herds. . . . Those held to servitude, and those employed as servants, lived in the marriage relation, and, with the patriarch as their chief, formed a patriarchal family. Authority over its members and over its property was the material fact.' The [defining, original] characteristic [of the patriarchal family was]: 'the incorporation of numbers [of people] in servile and dependent relations, before that time unknown. . . . [In the great movement of Semitic society, which produced this family,] paternal power over the group [was the object sought]; and with it a higher individuality of persons' <sup>80</sup>

Thus, the family was primarily an economic unit and the patriarch had complete authority over his family: 'the Roman family under *patria potestas*. Power of the father over life & death of his children & descendants, "as [well as] over [the] slaves and servants who formed the nucleus of the family and furnished its name; [and with] <his> absolute ownership of all the property they created"' <sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, Marx points out that, while the modern family broke up into smaller units while retaining the same name, the true basis of the patriarchal family was servile relations, which could be illustrated through the etymology of the word:

'*familia*, [which] contains [the] same element as *famulus*=servant, [which is] supposed to be derived from the Oscan<sup>82</sup> *famel*=servus, a slave.' *Festus* says: '*Famuli* originally comes from the Oscan, according to which the slave is called *Famul*, whence the term for family.' Thus 'in its primary meaning [the word] family had no relation to the married pair or their children, but <in relation> to the body of slaves and servants who labored for its maintenance, and were under the power of the pater familias. *Familia* in some testamentary dispositions is used as equivalent <for> *patrimonium*, the inheritance which passed to the heir' <sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Marx 1972, p. 119.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> This is an ancient-Italic language.

<sup>83</sup> Marx 1972, pp. 119–20.

Thus, the origins of the Western family came not from a married pair and their children, but from economic and social relationships stemming from the breakdown of clan-society. In this case, *familia* referred only to family property, and not the actual biological members of the family. The family as a solely-biological unit was a much later development.

As Marx notes, slavery and the patriarchal family were necessary conditions for the creation of the nuclear family, a point he addresses in his discussion of the ancient German family: 'family "*sheltered itself in a communal household*" (like the South Slavs) "*composed of related families. When slavery became an institution, these households would gradually disappear*".<sup>34</sup> Marx then adds his own comment to his paraphrase of Morgan's text: 'In fact, to enable its independent isolated existence, the *monogamian family* in all cases subordinates a *domestic class*, [which] in all cases [is] originally nothing but slaves'.<sup>35</sup> While Marx is not just speaking of women here (male slaves were also necessary at the time), women remained a subordinate domestic class long after the demise of the Greco-Roman slave-mode of production. Through economic advance, and especially capitalist development, men were freed from this form of servitude as well as from labour as a serf. But it is only the mechanisation created by capitalism which allowed women the opportunity to leave the domestic sphere, as was seen in his discussion of the working-day and machinery in *Capital*, Volume I (Chapter Three).

Moreover, Marx expounds further on the contingent nature of the patriarchal family of the Grecian and Roman types, and points to the Russians and other Slavs as examples of societies that were still primarily communal even in his own lifetime. The communal organisation of these societies was necessary, since they had not reached a level of development where isolated families could exist on their own: "'Several of the *Syndyasmanian families* [were] usually found in one house" (like among South Slavs: the *monogamian family*), "*forming a communal household*" (like South Slavs & in some degree: *Russian peasants* before & after [the] emancipation of [the] serfs) "*in which the principle of communism in living was practiced*. This fact proves... that the [nuclear] family was too feeble an organization to face alone the hardships of life".<sup>36</sup> While the patriarchal family's existence may have been necessary because of economic development, this was not a completely positive development, however. Instead, it increased the power of an individual above the rest of the family members: '*Paternal authority* "[was] impossible" in the *consanguine* and *punaluan families*; "[it] began to appear as a feeble influence in the *syndyasmanian*

<sup>34</sup> Marx 1972, p. 120.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Marx 1972, p. 116.

*family*, and [it became] fully established under *monogamy*" while it "[passed] beyond <all> bounds of reason"<sup>37</sup> in the *patriarchal family of the Roman type*'.<sup>38</sup> Here, Marx appears to apply a stronger criticism even than that of Morgan, in stating that in the Roman patriarchal family, paternal authority passed 'beyond all bounds of reason'.

What is perhaps most interesting about his discussion of the patriarchal family is that Marx appears to posit that it was the patriarchal family that is most important to understanding the transition to civilisation:

Fourier characterizes epochs of civilization by monogamy and landed private property. The modern family contains in germ not only *servitus* (slavery) but also *serfdom*, since from the outset it refers to *services* for agriculture. It contains in itself in *miniature* all the antagonisms that later develop widely in society & its state.<sup>39</sup>

It was the family as an economic unit that did the most to separate out the undifferentiated unity of public and private interests among individuals: 'The *patriarchal family* "...marks <the> peculiar epoch in human progress when the *individuality of the person began to rise above the gens*, in which it had previously been merged"'.<sup>40</sup> This individuality was one-sided, however, since it placed the individual above society, instead of in a higher unity with society.

### *Women's historical position and subjectivity*

One of the most important features that separates Marx from Engels in their views on women is Marx's emphasis on women's position in prehistoric societies, and their role as subjects throughout history. Where Engels saw women as subjects only before the introduction of monogamy and class-society, Marx viewed women as potential subjects in all periods of history. The position of women has varied a great deal throughout history. Therefore, it is not as simple as to say that monogamy produced the 'world-historic defeat of the female sex'.

In a number of cases, Marx copies Morgan's text and footnotes that point to women having significant power in the preliterate societies being studied. For example, Marx takes down a footnote which discusses the power that women had both in their homes and in the Iroquois council, emphasising the important position of women by underlining certain key portions:

<sup>37</sup> Here, Morgan uses the phrase 'an excess of domination'

<sup>38</sup> Marx 1972, p. 119.

<sup>39</sup> Marx 1972, p. 120.

<sup>40</sup> Marx 1972, p. 119.



*'Usually, the female portion ruled the house... The stores were in common, but woe to the luckless husband or lover who was too shiftless to do his share of the providing. No matter how many children, or whatever goods he might have in the house, he might at any time be ordered to pick up [his blanket] and budge[; and he] <dared not> attempt to disobey. The house would be too hot for him... he must retreat to his own gens, or, as was often done, go and start a new matrimonial alliance in some other. The women were the great power among the gens, as everywhere else. They did not hesitate, when occasion required, "to knock off the horns," as it was technically called, from the head of a chief, and send him back to the ranks of warriors. The original nomination of the chiefs also always rested with them'.<sup>91</sup>*

Here, through his use of underlining (here rendered in italics), Marx emphasises two forms of women's power in Iroquois society. First, women were in charge of the household. This was a matrilineal society, where women had the right to divorce their husbands. In addition to the power that women had by being able to reside with the rest of their clan, women also controlled the food-supply. This gave them a great deal of power in the more public realm, where they held veto-power over the chiefs.

At two other points, Marx also notes the relatively advanced position of women within Iroquois society. The first involves the religious ceremonies of the Iroquois, where women had a relatively equal position to that of the men. Like the men, they were allowed to be among the leaders of the religious ceremonies, the 'keepers of the faith': "'With no official head, [and] none of the marks of a priesthood, their functions [were] equal. The female "keepers of the faith" <esp.> charged with [the] preparation of the feast, [which was] provided at all councils at the close of each day for all persons in attendance'".<sup>92</sup> While there was certainly a division of labour among the men and women, there is no reason to automatically assume that women were seen as doing inferior work because they were in charge of the cooking. Instead, this was likely a very important part of the ceremony itself.

The second example of the relatively high position of women in Iroquois society involves the women's rights in the council that made decisions for the tribe. While the women themselves were not allowed to speak in the council, "'the women [Morgan, "even the women"] [were] allowed to express their wishes and opinions through an orator of their own election'".<sup>93</sup> In this case, Marx slightly

<sup>91</sup> Marx 1972, p. 116.

<sup>92</sup> Marx 1972, p. 149.

<sup>93</sup> Marx 1972, p. 162.

bends Morgan's statement that begins with the phrase 'even the women'.<sup>94</sup> Here, Marx sounds less condescending than Morgan, and does not seem to see it as unnatural for women to participate in governance.

While Iroquois women certainly had more power than the women in Marx's own time, their position was not ideal, however. As Marx points out from Morgan's text "'<the husbands demanded> chastity of the wives *under severe penalties* [which the husband might inflict], but [he did not admit the] reciprocal obligation. ... *polygamy* [was] universally recognized as the right of males, [although the] practice was limited from inability to support the indulgence'".<sup>95</sup> Here, Marx underlines 'under severe penalties' and 'polygamy' as a male right, likely pointing out the double standard even at this early point. Even among the relatively egalitarian communal society of the Iroquois, women's sexuality was still controlled by men who did not have to adhere to the same standard.

In addition to Marx's discussion of Morgan's treatment of the position of women in Iroquois society, he also takes down a passage from Morgan where he documents the low position of women within Greek society:

From first to last among the Greeks [there was] a principle of [egotism or] studied selfishness among the males, tending to lessen the appreciation of women, *scarcely found among savages*. . . the usages of centuries stamped upon the minds of Grecian women a sense of their inferiority.' (But the situation of the *goddesses on Olympus* demonstrates nostalgia for the former more free & influential position of the females. Powerhungry Juno, the goddess of wisdom springs from the head of Zeus etc.)<sup>96</sup> '<Greeks remained *barbarians*> in their treatment of the female sex at the height of their civilization. [The] education [of women was] superficial, intercourse with the opposite sex [was] denied them. . . [T]heir inferiority inculcated as a principle upon them, until it *came to be accepted as a fact by the women themselves*. The wife [was] not [the] companion [and the] equal <to> her husband, but . . . *in the relation of a daughter*. . .'<sup>97</sup>

Other than Marx simply noting the position of women, there are two other points within this passage that stand out. First, in the middle of these excerpts from Morgan's text, Marx adds – as seen above – a comment of his own: 'But the situation of the *goddesses on Olympus* demonstrates nostalgia for the former more free & influential position of the females. Powerhungry Juno,

<sup>94</sup> Morgan 1877, p. 119.

<sup>95</sup> Marx 1972, p. 117.

<sup>96</sup> This is Marx's addition.

<sup>97</sup> Marx 1972, p. 121.

the goddess of wisdom springs from the head of Zeus etc.' Women in Greek society were oppressed, but they were not completely without subjectivity. Second, Marx again bends Morgan's text slightly. While Marx says that the Greeks were 'barbarians in their treatment of the female sex', Morgan states that the Greeks were '*essentially* barbarians'.<sup>98</sup> Here, Marx sharpens Morgan's critique of Greek patriarchy.

The position of Greek goddesses pointed both to a past in which women were less oppressed, and at the same time pointed to a possible future in which women would again have a higher status. As imbued as certain Greek myths were with patriarchal assumptions, Greek women would need to do more than simply emulate Juno (Hera) and Athena. 'Nostalgia for the former more free & influential position of the females' in Greece would not be enough to fundamentally change the position of women in Greek society. However, these figures did offer some starting points. To begin with, both of these goddesses lived among men, rather than in seclusion, and played a significant role in society, albeit not always a positive one.

More importantly, both maintained a great deal of control over their sexuality, despite the limits imposed both by the primitive state of contraception and by the social forces at the time. Hera was able to decide on her own that she would not raise her son Hephaestus, while Athena likely chose to remain a virgin, given the difficulties at that time of remaining in a position of authority while raising a family. Certainly, in both cases, these were choices based on imperfect options, but it could have provided a starting point for a critique of Greek patriarchy.

Additionally, while Morgan argues that female seclusion was seen in Greek society as a necessary condition for assuring the legitimacy of children, Marx takes a somewhat different position. As Smith argues: 'Marx radically paraphrases Morgan's ensuing remarks, leaving aside further argumentation to the effect that the seclusion of women was designed to guarantee the legitimacy of children. In Marx's hands, Morgan's argument is reduced to the claim that Greek monogamy, pivoting around the seclusion of women, served to overcome the surviving traces of communal marriage'.<sup>99</sup> Here, Marx points to the need to assert power over women to enforce monogamy. The issue was not just about whether the children would be their own, but about the power that men had over women more generally.

Again, Marx notes the necessarily repressive nature of early forms of monogamy in ancient-Greek society: '... whatever of monogamy existed, was

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<sup>98</sup> Morgan 1877, p. 482, emphasis added.

<sup>99</sup> Smith (forthcoming).

*through an enforced constraint upon wives...some degree of seclusion*'.<sup>100</sup> Here, Marx appears to note the resistance from women to limitations on their sexuality. Women did not necessarily agree to this arrangement, as Engels would later claim;<sup>101</sup> instead, some degree of force and significant surveillance would be required.

The measure of constraint on women could vary to some extent, however. In a number of ways, aristocratic Roman women were freer than their Greek counterparts: "[As] *mater familias* [she] was mistress of the family; [she] went into the streets freely without restraint by her husband, [and] frequented with the men the theaters and festive banquets; in the house [she was] not confined to particular apartments, nor excluded from the table of the men." Roman females thus [had] "more personal dignity and...independence" than Greek [women]; but marriage gave them "*in manum viri*".<sup>102</sup> While women's position in society improved greatly in Rome, Marx notes through his underlining that the situation was far from ideal. Women still remained under the authority of their husbands, rather than being fully autonomous individuals.

Additionally, Marx notes the socially-constructed nature of all historical forms of the family with regard to the parentage of the children: 'Each of the *systems of consanguinity* "expresses the actual relationships existing in the family at the time of its establishment...The relations of mother & child,...brother & sister,...grandmother & grandchild, were always ascertainable" (since the establishment of any form of family at all), "but not those of father & child...grandfather & grandchild"; the latter only (at least officially?) ascertainable in monogamy'.<sup>103</sup> Here, Marx suggests that the family is not something ahistorical and 'natural', but instead a social construction, based in part on the material conditions at a particular time, where paternity will (at least until recent times) necessarily be uncertain. More important than his critique of the monogamous family and its necessary corollary of heterosexuality and infidelity, is his parenthetical insert regarding the 'relations of mother & child'. Here as well, there appears to be some room for non-biological determinations. While Morgan states that relationships between family-members through the mother were always certain, Marx adds the phrase 'since the establishment of any form of family at all'. Thus, while there is a biological element to the family, even this is socially mediated through the structures of society in order to determine membership in the family.

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<sup>100</sup> Marx 1972, p. 120

<sup>101</sup> Engels 1986, p. 83

<sup>102</sup> Marx 1972, p. 121. Into the power of the husband.

<sup>103</sup> Marx 1972, p. 104.

### Engels's *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*

In a number of ways, Engels's *Origin of the Family* was a noteworthy work. First, in contrast to the period of utopian socialism of the early nineteenth century which addressed the oppression of women in great detail, by this time, the socialist movement had moved away from such criticisms of familial and other forms of women's oppression. This was especially true in Proudhonist circles, where misogyny was commonplace. Second, Engels's focus on the economic sphere was also important. This created the ground, albeit somewhat problematically, for relating class- and gender-oppression, and pointed out that women could not gain equality without gaining in terms of economic rights as well.<sup>104</sup> Third, as Barrett notes, Engels was one of the few men at the time that even tried to 'consider sexuality from the woman's point of view', albeit in a somewhat limited form.<sup>105</sup> Despite the ground-breaking nature of his work, I argue, however, that Engels's *Origin of the Family* was marred by an overly-deterministic framework and by an inadequate focus on the social elements of change.

In her introduction to Engels's *Origin of the Family*, Eleanor Leacock analyses the merits and shortcomings of both Morgan and Engels's studies of primitive societies, focusing on the ways in which they are relevant to today. In general theoretical terms, Leacock argues that Engels's work, while based upon the early researches of anthropology, remains relatively valid today, particularly in terms of the position of women in these less-developed societies.<sup>106</sup> Women were responsible for a large share of food-production in hunter/gatherer societies and in at least early agricultural societies. This gave them significantly more power and prestige in the community than in more economically developed societies, where women became relegated to the private sphere.<sup>107</sup> Thus, their research provides at least the beginnings of a model of the subjugation of women, although there are many particulars that need to be filled in for each particular case.<sup>108</sup>

However, there were at least three difficulties with Engels's work. First, even today, there is very little knowledge of the earliest societies: therefore, many of the assumptions on the earliest period – savagery – that Engels takes from Morgan are simply speculation. While we have a little more knowledge

<sup>104</sup> Anderson 2010, p. 199.

<sup>105</sup> Barrett 1986, p. 20.

<sup>106</sup> Leacock 1978, p. 30. For more detailed information on this topic, see for example Reiter 1975, Leacock 1958, Gould 1999, and Reed 1972.

<sup>107</sup> Leacock 1978, pp. 33–4.

<sup>108</sup> Leacock 1978, p. 16.

today, this still remains a major shortcoming for anthropology.<sup>109</sup> Second, Engels makes a huge leap, without much empirical data, from these very early egalitarian societies to the subjugation of women. There is still a great deal that we do not know about how and why this subjugation came about.<sup>110</sup> Finally, Morgan, and thus Engels, give no information on non-Western societies: therefore, their findings cannot apply outside Europe, North America, and perhaps also Australia, where some examples were provided.<sup>111</sup>

### *Feminist responses to 'Origin of the Family'*

Feminists have responded in a variety of ways to Engels's *Origin of the Family*. Many, including de Beauvoir, Barrett and Vogel, have argued to varying degrees that Engels's argument is based on a form of economic determinism which does not adequately account for women's oppression.<sup>112</sup> De Beauvoir argues that Engels cannot account for the oppression of women from the introduction of private property and women's muscular weakness alone. Instead, the problem stems from man's nature, seeking transcendence even at the expense of others, including women.<sup>113</sup> While de Beauvoir is certainly correct in pointing to the inadequacy of Engels's economic determinism for understanding women's oppression, she significantly downplays the importance of material factors that can act as limitations on conscious human activity.

Barrett and Vogel also criticise Engels's economistic framework. This is particularly significant because, as Barrett argues, Engels primarily relied on the introduction of women into the workforce to change the status of women. Engels's project failed in this case, because he did not see how deep women's oppression was in terms of the double work-day and because 'he failed to appreciate the far-reaching effects of ideologies of what was appropriate as men's work and women's work'.<sup>114</sup> Thus, more would be needed than to simply raise women to the same status as men in the workplace. Vogel discusses a similar point. As was the case with a number of other socialist feminists, she argues that Engels paid inadequate attention to the reproduction of workers, since he tended to focus on economic factors and very rarely discussed socialisation.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Leacock 1978, pp 28–9.

<sup>110</sup> Leacock 1978, p 42.

<sup>111</sup> Leacock 1978, p 49.

<sup>112</sup> See de Beauvoir 1989, Barrett 1986, and Vogel 1983.

<sup>113</sup> De Beauvoir 1989, pp 57–8.

<sup>114</sup> Barrett 1986, p. 25.

<sup>115</sup> Vogel 1983, p. 91.

While de Beauvoir, Barrett, and Vogel all provide important critiques of Engels's *Origin of the Family*, all three tend to conflate the positions of Marx and Engels. I will argue below, however, that Marx takes a more nuanced approach that allows for more discussion of these kinds of issues, since he was operating within a more dialectical framework able to avoid the sort of determinism that Engels's study displays. First, however, it is important to discuss Engels's *Origin of the Family* in some detail, in order to compare Marx and Engels on gender and the family.

### *Unilinearism and economic determinism*

One of the most important aspects of Engels's study is his argument that the introduction of private property led to the end of matrilineal society,<sup>116</sup> and thus the beginning of gender-oppression. Since men were responsible for providing food for the clan, and because it was necessary to use tools for this purpose, men gained power in terms of acquiring private property. Also, with the new form of the family – the pairing family – the paternity of the child could be determined. Finally, the father of the children wanted to be sure to pass his property on to his own children. These factors led to the change from the matrilineal determination of family to the patrilineal determination of family.<sup>117</sup>

This led to a significant change in position for the women in society:

The overthrow of mother right was the *world historical defeat of the female sex*. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. This degraded position of woman, especially conspicuous among the Greeks of the heroic and still more of the classical age, has gradually been palliated and glossed over, and sometimes clothed in a milder form, in no sense has it been abolished.<sup>118</sup>

Women, from this point onwards, would be subject to oppression by men. They had no subjectivity of their own, according to Engels. Women would

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<sup>116</sup> While Engels, Morgan, and to some extent Marx, make no distinction between matriarchal and matrilineal societies, what Morgan is primarily describing are matrilineal societies. Within these societies, women had more power than in many more modern societies, but this does not mean that these societies were ruled by women. Instead, Morgan's evidence illustrates that women were not as powerful as Engels saw them.

<sup>117</sup> Engels 1986, pp. 84–5.

<sup>118</sup> Engels 1986, p. 87.

only be liberated with the end of private property and the introduction of communism.

The antagonism among men and women created by the change to father-right is the beginning of class-conflict:

The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male. Monogamous marriage was a great historical step forward, nevertheless, together with slavery and private wealth, it opens the period that has lasted until today in which every step forward is also relatively a step backward, in which prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others. It is the cellular form of civilized society in which the nature of the oppositions and contradictions fully active in that society can be already studied.<sup>119</sup>

Here, Engels provides a deterministic assessment of the beginning of class- and gender-conflict. While the development of the oppressive form of the monogamous family limited women's rights, it was a necessary development for civilisation to occur. More problematic, however, is Engels's close association of gender- and class-oppression. Since he views them as developing simultaneously and from the same causes, he automatically assumes that, with the end of private property, gender-oppression will end as well.

Overall, Engels posits an idealised past, in which there were no major antagonisms in society. For example, in contrast to Marx, Engels views Iroquois society as mostly egalitarian and almost completely without contradiction:

Their [the Iroquois] mode of producing the necessities of life, unvarying from year to year, could never generate such conflicts as were apparently forced on the Athenians from without; it could never create an opposition of rich and poor, of exploiters and exploited. The Iroquois were still very far from controlling nature, but within the limits imposed on them by natural forces they did control their own production ... The certain result was a livelihood, plentiful or scanty, but one result there could never be – social upheavals that no one had ever intended, sundering of the gentile bonds, division of gens and tribe into two opposing and warring classes. Production was limited in the extreme, but – the producers controlled their product. That was the immense advantage of barbarian production which was lost with the coming of civilization ...<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Engels 1986, p. 96

<sup>120</sup> Engels 1986, pp. 145–6.



While Marx would agree with Engels's position regarding the precarious nature of production in these early societies, as pointed out above, Marx saw contradictions beginning to develop very early in clan-society. Here, Engels appears to be arguing that it was only with the development of technology and larger surpluses of goods that significant conflict began to occur. While economic and technological forces are very important, Engels provides a one-sided explanation to the development of class- and gender-based antagonisms which ignores the social elements of contradiction that were already present within Iroquois society.

Moreover, this model is very deterministic. There is little room for human agency; instead, there are only impersonal economic and social forces. The family 'clearly reveals the antagonism between the man and the woman expressed in the man's exclusive supremacy, it exhibits in miniature the same oppositions and contradictions as those in which society has been moving, *without power to resolve or overcome them...*'<sup>121</sup>

Only with technology could women regain their former position, since machines were necessary for women to do men's work in the 'productive' public sphere:

With the patriarchal family and still more with the single monogamous family, a change came. Household management lost its public character. It no longer concerned society. It became a *private service*; the wife became the head servant, excluded from all participation in social production. Not until the coming of modern large-scale industry was the road to social production opened to her again – and then only to the proletarian wife. But it was opened in such a manner that, if she carries out her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and unable to earn; and if she wants to take part in public production and earn independently, she cannot carry out family duties. And the wife's position in the factory is the position of women in all branches of business, right up to medicine and the law. The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules.<sup>122</sup>

While Engels points to women's oppression within the family due to their status as primarily domestic servants, his discussion remains at an abstract level. Women are solely the subject of impersonal social and economic forces that keep them in virtual servitude. It is only when these impersonal economic,

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<sup>121</sup> Engels 1986, p. 98, emphasis added.

<sup>122</sup> Engels 1986, pp. 104–5.

social and technological forces evolve to a significant extent that women will regain their former position. Here and elsewhere, Engels focuses one-sidedly on objective material forces at the expense of what can be equally important subjective forces.

This has profound consequences for theorising what is necessary to end women's oppression. Engels argued that it was necessary to allow women to work in the public sphere, and that this would create the conditions for higher relations between the sexes. This, according to Engels, was already occurring: 'And now that large-scale industry has taken the wife out of the home onto the labour market and into the factory, and made her often the breadwinner of the family, no basis for any kind of male supremacy is left in the proletarian household, except, perhaps, for something of the brutality toward women that has spread since the introduction of monogamy'.<sup>123</sup> As history has shown, the introduction of women into the workforce, while a necessary condition for ending women's oppression, it is certainly not a sufficient one.<sup>124</sup> Instead, patriarchal norms continue to be prevalent in the workplace and throughout society.

This is significantly different from the position that Marx puts forward in his early writings, however. For example, as seen in Chapter Two, in his essay/translation of Peuchet's work on suicide, Marx points to familial oppression within the bourgeois family that is not solely based on economic considerations. Instead, women were oppressed in their families because of their status as women, and this form of oppression was as significant as any other: '*The revolution did not topple all tyrannies. The evil which one blames on arbitrary forces exists in families, where it causes crises, analogous to those of revolutions*'.<sup>125</sup> Additionally, in *The Holy Family*, Marx writes that 'the general condition of women in modern society [is] an inhuman one' again pointing to more than economically based oppression.<sup>126</sup>

### *Similarities and differences on patriarchal society and its historical significance*

While Morgan tended to downgrade the importance of this form of the family, Marx and Engels both saw the patriarchal stage as a very important transitional stage between the pairing family and that of strict monogamy. This difference of emphasis is likely due to Morgan's stricter adherence to a unilinear model of development, even more so than Engels's. This tran-

<sup>123</sup> Engels 1986, p. 103.

<sup>124</sup> Barrett 1986, pp. 24–5.

<sup>125</sup> Marx 1999, p. 51. This is Peuchet's text but the emphasis is Marx's.

<sup>126</sup> Marx and Engels 1956, p. 258.

sitional form of the family only occurred in a few cases, the Semitic tribes, ancient Greece and ancient Rome. Thus, in some sense it is an historically-contingent and not a universal phase of development.

In his use of Marx's notes, Engels clearly picks up on Marx's critique of the patriarchal family. He directly quotes Marx's statement on 'the modern family' containing 'in miniature' all later contradictions in society<sup>127</sup> and notes the importance of this transitional form: 'In any case, the patriarchal household community with common ownership and common cultivation of the land now assumes an entirely different significance than hitherto. We can no longer doubt the important part it played as a transitional form between the matriarchal family and the single family among civilized and other peoples of the Old World'.<sup>128</sup> While they are largely in agreement on its role as a transitional form, Marx and Engels differ in terms of the role that it played in regard to the position of women:

It [the patriarchal family] develops out of the pairing family, as previously shown, in the transitional period between the upper and middle stages of barbarism; its decisive victory is one of the signs that civilization is beginning. It is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father's property as his natural heirs. It is distinguished from pairing marriage by the much greater strength of the marriage tie, which can no longer be dissolved at either partner's wish. As a rule, it is now the man who can dissolve it and put away his wife. The right of conjugal infidelity also remains secured to him at any rate by custom (the *Code Napoléon* explicitly accords it to the husband as long as he does not bring his concubine into the house), and as social life develops he exercises his right more and more; should the wife recall the old form of sexual life and attempt to revive it, she is punished more severely than ever.<sup>129</sup>

While Marx emphasises the role of men's power over women, as discussed above, Engels focuses more on property-relations and the need for men to transfer their property to their children. Thus, for Marx, the causes of women's oppression in the patriarchal family involve more than property- and inheritance-rights.

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<sup>127</sup> Engels 1986, p. 88.

<sup>128</sup> Engels 1986, p. 91.

<sup>129</sup> Engels 1986, pp. 92–3.

*Engels's uncritical acceptance of Morgan and Bachofen on women's position in clan-societies*

While Marx saw conflict beginning to develop very early within society between the lower and higher ranks, as well as between men and women, Engels tended to see complete equality between groups until the transition to monogamy. This becomes especially clear in his discussions of women's sexual freedom in prehistoric societies. For example, in a discussion of Australian aboriginal tribes, Engels did not see the possibility of social coercion of women in their practice of men giving their wives to a traveller for a night:

The law by which the Australian aborigine, wandering hundreds of miles from his home among people whose language he does not understand, nevertheless often finds in every camp and every tribe women who give themselves to him without resistance and without resentment – the law by which the man with several wives gives one up for the night to his guest. Where the European sees immorality and lawlessness, strict law rules in reality. The women belong to the marriage group of the stranger, and therefore they are his wives by birth; that same law of custom which gives the two to one another forbids under penalty of outlawry all intercourse outside the marriage groups that belong together. Even when wives are captured, as frequently occurs in many places, the law of the exogamous classes is still carefully observed.<sup>130</sup>

While Engels is right to point out that this practice was based on custom and was essentially 'legal' in these societies, he does not discuss choice here. It cannot be automatically assumed that women had free choice.<sup>131</sup> Rather, it is more likely that there was at least some subtle coercion involved. Thus, even at this early point, it appears that men had some power over women's sexuality. Here, Engels appears to lapse into a form of cultural relativism, by pointing only to the 'legal' status of the practice and failing to examine the possibility of coercion.

Following Morgan and Marx, Engels pointed out that the Iroquois family and society was based upon much more egalitarian relations than the societies in which they lived. Conditions were not ideal, however: 'In this state [pairing marriage], one man lives with one woman, but the relationship is such that polygamy and occasional infidelity remain the right of men, even

<sup>130</sup> Engels 1986, p. 75.

<sup>131</sup> Barrett 1986, p. 22. Leacock glosses over the issue of choice, and argues against viewing this as potentially illustrating a lower status of women relative to other early societies. Leacock 1978, p. 30.

though for economic reasons polygamy is rare, while from the woman the strictest fidelity is generally demanded throughout the time she lives with the man and adultery on her part is cruelly punished. The marriage tie can, however, be easily dissolved by either partner; after separation, the children still belong as before to the mother alone'.<sup>152</sup> Here, Engels missed an opportunity to criticise the position of women among the Iroquois. Men clearly had much greater sexual freedom than women, although it was still possible for women to divorce. Marx also notes this fact without criticism, but there is still difference between the two on this point. As Dunayevskaya points out, in his notebooks, Marx saw conflict developing within the egalitarian communal structures, where Engels did not.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, even though Marx only highlights this in his notes and failed to criticise it, there is no reason why such a critique would not fit into the general framework of his analysis. For Engels, this would be much more difficult, however.

Additionally, Engels's discussion of the transition to pairing marriage and eventually monogamy is also somewhat problematic. Engels takes nineteenth-century norms about women and applies them to the transition from group-marriage to the pairing family, arguing that women sought the institution of the pairing family to claim the 'right of chastity':

Bachofen<sup>154</sup> is also perfectly right when he consistently maintains that the transition from what he calls 'hetaerism' or '*Sumpfteugung*' to monogamy was brought about primarily through the women. The more the traditional sexual relations lost the naïve primitive character of forest life, owing to the development of economic conditions with consequent undermining of the old communism and growing density of population, the more oppressive and humiliating must the women have felt them to be, and the greater their longing for the right of chastity, of temporary or permanent marriage with one man only, as a way of release. This advance could not in any case have originated with the men if only because it has never occurred to them, even to this day, to renounce the pleasures of actual group marriage. Only when the women had brought about the transition to pairing marriage were the men able to introduce strict monogamy – though indeed only for women.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Engels 1986, p. 77.

<sup>153</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 180.

<sup>154</sup> Here, Engels is referring to Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* ('Mother-Right'), which was the first book to argue that matriarchal societies had existed.

<sup>155</sup> Engels 1986, p. 83.

While Engels points to an earlier antagonism between men and women, he essentially argues that it was technological progress that led women to feel oppressed and humiliated and thus to seek a remedy for this. He offers no reason for why marriage to one man would in any way end this humiliation, other than relying on nineteenth-century norms of women's sexuality. Here, Engels seems to point to a relatively static notion of women's sexuality following the transition to monogamy. He glosses over the possibility that this too is a product of conflict over time.

Engels continues this discussion in regard to the introduction of monogamy:

We have seen how right Bachofen was in regarding the advance from group marriage to individual marriage as primarily due to the women. Only the step from pairing marriage to monogamy can be put down to the credit of the men, and historically the essence of this was to make the position of the women worse and the infidelities of the men easier. If now the economic considerations also disappear which made women put up with the habitual infidelity of their husbands – concern for their own means of existence and still more for their children's future – then, according to all previous experience, the equality of women thereby achieved will tend infinitely more to make men really monogamous than to make women polyandrous.<sup>136</sup>

Men gained economic power and thus could enforce monogamy on women. Capitalism has created conditions for the overthrow of this system, but, for Engels, it is not likely to overthrow monogamy; it will only make monogamy more universal. Here Engels's economism and moderate Victorian ideology becomes apparent.

Finally, while Engels includes a discussion of Marx's comments on the Greek goddesses and the position of Greek women, he misses the more nuanced dialectical argument that Marx is making on women's subjectivity. 'While the position of the goddesses in their mythology, as Marx points out, refers to an earlier period when the position of women was freer and more respected, in the heroic age we find the woman already being humiliated by the domination of the man and by competition from girl slaves'.<sup>137</sup> Part of Marx's point was that women were treated poorly in ancient Greece, but Engels leaves out the rest of Marx's discussion that refers to a situation which 'demonstrates nostalgia for the former more free & influential position of the females'. Women were clearly oppressed, but, for Marx, their mythology had the potential to illustrate to them both how much freer they could be, and at

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<sup>136</sup> Engels 1986, p. 113.

<sup>137</sup> Engels 1986, p. 93.

least a possible means of achieving this higher position. While one can certainly be critical of how Marx reads these myths as potentially empowering, despite the low status of women even in these myths, the important point to draw from this is that Marx saw these women as potential subjects of history, rather than merely the objects of powerful Greek men as Engels emphasised.

### Comparing Marx and Engels on gender and the family

Marx and Engels shared similar views on most political, economic and social issues and collaborated on a number of projects – both intellectual and political – throughout their lives. This has led many commentators to view their writings as containing virtually the same ideas. In many cases, this is not a defensible argument. This is especially true in terms of their views on the origins of gender-inequality. Engels held that the introduction of private property created the conditions for the oppression of women. Marx, however, had a much more nuanced argument, in which property was not the only important variable and where women were subjects of history even after the overthrow of mother-right. Marx saw that even in communal societies, contradictions began to develop very early. As Dunayevskaya argues:

Nothing less than the vital question of transitions is at stake in the differences between Marx's and Engels's views. Marx was showing that it is *during* the transition period that you see the duality emerging to reveal the beginnings of antagonisms, whereas Engels always seems to have antagonisms only at the end, as if class society came in very nearly full blown *after* the communal form was destroyed and private property was established. *Moreover, for Marx the dialectical development from one stage to another is related to new revolutionary upsurges, whereas Engels sees it as a unilateral progression. ... Marx, on the contrary, showed that the elements of oppression in general, and of women in particular, arose from within primitive communism, and not only related to change from 'matriarchy,' but began with the establishment of ranks – relationship of chief to mass – and the economic interests that accompanied it.*<sup>138</sup>

As Dunayevskaya argues, Marx's views on the relationship between the development of class- and gender-antagonisms was much more complex than Engels's. Engels tended to view the development of these antagonisms in a **unilinear, monocausal framework**. For example, as dealt with above in his discussion of the transition from the clan to the state in Athenian society,

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<sup>138</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991, pp. 180–1.

Engels draws a sharp distinction between an Athenian society, torn by conflict between the clan-principle and the nascent state, and the seemingly-idyllic Iroquois society based on the clan: 'Their [the Iroquois] mode of producing the necessities of life, unvarying from year to year, could never generate such conflicts as were apparently forced on the Athenians from without; it could never create an opposition of rich and poor, of exploiters and exploited. . . . The certain result was a livelihood, plentiful or scanty; but one result there could never be – social upheavals that no one had ever intended, sundering of the gentile bonds, division of gens and tribe into two opposing and warring classes'.<sup>139</sup> Here, Engels returns to an idealistic view of early communal societies, where he argued that little-to-no conflict existed. For Engels, before the development of significant surpluses – due in large part to the development of better tools for agriculture – societies not only existed without conflict, but social conflict in these societies was impossible.

This provides a significant contrast to Marx, who sees the potential for social conflict much earlier. While Engels argues that social conflict comes from something external to the clan-system, at one point in Marx's notes on Morgan's discussion of the Native-American Kutchin tribe, who were beginning to develop into ranks, he adds a comment on the potential for the development of caste within the clan: 'And in the breed, namely how [would] conquest would be added on to the gentile principle, could the *gentes* little by little give occasion for *caste formation*? Where then the prohibition of *intermarriage between different gentes* totally perverts the *archaic rule* of [prohibition of] *intermarriage within the same gens*'.<sup>140</sup> Here, Marx points to the possibility that the clan's marriage-system, which originally assured equality among all of the clan, could turn into its opposite when conquest of other tribes occurred. If the conquered clan is not fully integrated into the marriage-relations of the conquering tribe, then what was formally an egalitarian institution – marriage within the clan – becomes its opposite, an institution for the potential creation of castes, since one or more clans have become socially inferior and unmarriageable in relation to the others.

In contrast to Engels, Marx saw a number of factors as important to understanding the development of antagonisms in the clan. These antagonisms existed even within the earliest periods of the clan, even though they were quite underdeveloped. Early communal societies were not completely unproblematic in terms of social antagonisms. This is especially true for women's position in society, as Marx notes in regard to women's forced chastity,

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<sup>139</sup> Engels 1986, pp. 145–6

<sup>140</sup> Marx 1972, p. 183.



as seen above. However, women's less powerful position was not 'the world-historical defeat of the female sex', where women would have to wait for the arrival of socialism to regain their former position. Instead, as Marx's discussion of the oppression and confinement of Greek women illustrates, he saw the potential for women's subjectivity even under very harsh circumstances.

Perhaps the most significant difference that emerges from a comparison of Marx and Engels is Engels's more deterministic arguments. While Marx often takes note of the contingent nature of certain developments and points out possibilities for human activity – in addition to economic and technological forces – to change social conditions, Engels primarily looks to economic and technological forces to explain possibilities for change. Thus, Engels remains within a relatively deterministic and unilinear framework, whereas Marx's formulation allows for greater variety in outcomes and for a much greater degree of human agency, especially for women.

## Chapter Six

# **The Family, the State and Property-Rights: The Dialectics of Gender and the Family in Precapitalist Societies**

In addition to Marx's notes on Morgan's *Ancient Society*, which Engels addressed to some extent in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Marx also took notes on a variety of other anthropological sources, including John Budd Phear, John Lubbock, Maxim Kovalevsky, Henry Sumner Maine, and Ludwig Lange. The notes regarding Ludwig Lange's *Römische Alterthümer* ('Ancient Rome') and Henry Sumner Maine's *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* are, for the purposes of this study, the most significant sources that Engels did not deal with in *The Origin of the Family*. Similarly to the notes Marx took on Morgan, these were never written up for publication; nor is it clear what he intended to do with them. They remain important, however, since they contain a number of important passages on the position of women in various societies including ancient-Roman, Irish, and Indian societies based on the clan.

This chapter will examine Marx's notes on Maine and Lange in an attempt to elucidate the general direction of these notes with respect to gender and the family. In contrast to Marx's generally sympathetic reading of Morgan, his notes on Maine contain a great deal of harsh criticism. In his discussion of Irish and Indian clan-society, Maine uncritically assumed the existence of the patriarchal family in early communal societies, supported British

colonialism, and viewed the role of Christianity in Irish society as positive. Marx takes issue with all of these assumptions as well as a number of others. Most significantly, Marx's notes on the position of women in both societies show a great deal more nuance than Maine's portrait does. Moreover, these notes support the argument that Marx saw no 'world-historic defeat of the female sex' as Engels did. Instead, Marx saw the position of women in these societies as variable, based on a number of factors. While it was clear that women could not be completely emancipated in these early societies, given the low level of technological development, this is not the same as saying that their position did not change at all or only changed as a result of processes in which they were not involved. Women were necessarily an important force in the historical development of humanity, since they did not and could not exist completely outside of society. Women were often both wives and mothers, with at least some subtle influence over the men in their lives. While large-scale changes may not have been initiated by women in these ancient societies, their actions as well as the actions of their male kin and eventually the state, to either allow women to gain more rights or to further restrict their rights, at times had interesting and important effects on other areas of society as well.

Marx's notes on Lange look at a number of issues with regard to women, property and the patriarchal family. Here, Marx appears to be tracking a number of changes in Roman society as the state took over from the patrician clan with its family-law as the most significant governing authority. It was the conflict between the plebeians – who were not included in clan-law – and the patricians that led to the development of a new institution, the state, to mitigate conflict. This led to a number of changes in status for plebeians, as well as for women. As women came under the control of the state at the expense of the *paterfamilias* and other men in the family, their position in society tended to improve somewhat, at least for those in the upper classes.

### **Maine's Lectures on the Early History of Institutions**

Henry Sumner Maine's *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* contains a series of lectures on Irish and Indian law in the periods before each was replaced by British colonial law.<sup>1</sup> Maine's sources mainly include the ancient written law in both societies: the *Senchus Mor* and *Book of Aicill* in Ireland and the *Mitakshara* in India. His discussion focuses on the origin and development of property, ancient forms of legal remedies, and sovereignty.

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<sup>1</sup> Maine 1875.

Most important for the purposes of this study is his discussion of the ancient family, which is scattered throughout the text, and more specifically his chapter 'The Early History of the Settled Property of Married Women'. Throughout his notes, Marx is very critical of Maine's arguments, especially those involving his assumption that the first form of family in all 'Aryan' societies was patriarchal. By now, Marx had already made his notes on Morgan, in which he had embraced the latter's argument that the clan was one of the earliest forms of societal organisation.

In contrast to his notes on Morgan, Marx excerpts significantly smaller portions of Maine's work, at the same time providing much more commentary of his own. In many cases, he is making critical comments about Maine as well as other scholars such as Barthold Niebuhr and Johann Bachofen. While there is much of interest in Marx's Maine notes, three areas in relation to gender and the family are particularly compelling: Marx's critique of Maine on the origin of the family in patriarchal society; his treatment of the position of Irish women prior to the institution of English law; and his discussion of the history of the property-rights of Indian women.

### Marx's notes on Maine

Even after Krader's 1972 publication of Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks*, there has been very little commentary on these notebooks. This is especially true in relation to Marx's views on gender and the family. However, some have discussed these writings in various other contexts. Krader, in his important and detailed introduction to the *Ethnological Notebooks*, does address gender briefly, and points to Marx's relatively strong critique of most of Maine's work, especially regarding the structure and development of the family and property.<sup>2</sup> Instead of accepting Maine's view that the *paterfamilias* and private property are natural features of human society, Marx saw the need to trace their path of development from the clan and communal property to the modern family and private property: 'Marx continued his systematic separation of the family from other institutions of primitive society, wherein he followed Morgan's initiative, applying the differentiation to the separation of patriarch/*paterfamilias* from gens/tribe chief, likewise to the relevant forms of property and its transmission. Private property in land is not to be directly derived in our theory from the collective property but came gradually to replace it in the transition to political society, just as control over the gens to the family; inheritance within the private family is opposed to the

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<sup>2</sup> Krader 1972.

[Irish] Tanaist rule of passage of the chieftry by election, usually to the brother and not the son'.<sup>3</sup> This is something that Marx began to work out in these notebooks through his critical reading of Maine's work on ancient-Irish and Indian society, where he traced the development of the individual (especially the chief) at the expense of communal interests.<sup>4</sup> However, Krader does not discuss in detail Marx's critique of Maine on gender and the family.

Dunayevskaya discusses Marx's notebooks in the context of his increasing hostility to capitalism and colonialism, as well as in terms of understanding the development of class- and gender-distinctions.<sup>5</sup> Throughout his notes, and especially in regard to Maine, Marx criticises the narrow-minded thinking of these authors who, because of their own assumptions about precapitalist societies, missed important aspects of these societies: 'Throughout Marx's Notebooks, his attack on colonialism, racism as well as discrimination against women, is relentless, as he refers to the British historians, jurists, anthropologists, and lawyers as "blockheads" who definitely didn't appreciate what discoveries were being made and therefore often skipped over whole historic periods of humanity'.<sup>6</sup>

Dunayevskaya writes that, in contrast to Maine and others who tended to see these precapitalist societies as simply less-developed forms of patriarchal, capitalist society, Marx notes their egalitarian nature, while still pointing to the contradictions that led to the development of a class-structure: 'At the same time that he was stressing the greatness of primitive society, he was also stressing that it was not a question of an outside force, but that right from *within* the primitive communal society there had already arisen elements of difference between the chief and the ranks, in which we could, indeed, see the class struggle and the disintegration of the old society'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, contrary to Engels's and Morgan's interpretation that these communal societies were almost completely egalitarian, Marx notes the development of difference in the commune through the individuation of the chief at a very early stage.

Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter regarding the Morgan notes, Dunayevskaya points to Marx's interest in the development of the early family and its relationship to the development of class-society and the state. Conflict occurred on multiple fronts, and it was not as simple as to say that the introduction of private property led to the subjugation of women: 'The point at all times is to stress a differentiation in the family, both when it is part of the

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<sup>3</sup> Krader 1972, p. 37

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Dunayevskaya 1985 and 1991

<sup>6</sup> Dunayevskaya 1985, pp. 218–19

<sup>7</sup> Dunayevskaya 1985, pp. 58–9.

gens and as it evolves out of the gens into another social form, at which point Marx again differentiates between the family in a society that already has a state and the family before the state emerged. The point at all times is to have a critical attitude to both biologism and uncritical evolutionism'.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to his argument that Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* represent an attempt by Marx to expand his knowledge of social structures beyond Europe to non-Western societies in order to explore the challenges that capitalism would face in its expansion (as discussed in the previous chapter), Smith also briefly touches on the content of Marx's critiques of the authors that he is reading.<sup>9</sup> This is particularly relevant to Marx's notes on Maine, since as Smith states in the introduction to his forthcoming publication of the English translation of these notes, 'of all Marx's writings on ethnological subjects, his notes on Maine's *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* are the richest in criticism'.

Particularly here, but also in his other notes, Marx offers a strong critique of what Smith refers to as the 'authority fetish':

In his ethnological studies, besides documenting the entirely classless and stateless character of clan societies, Marx also offers sustained and many-sided objections to what we can reasonably call authority fetishism. Often, Marx pauses to criticize scholars and colonists who imagine that they see the hand of the patriarch or the feudal lord in social relations that are inherently nonpatriarchal and nonfeudal. He delves into the evidence concerning divine kingship and, in general, 'manworship' (which he links to Gladstone and Victoria as well as to Ashanti and Tahitian monarchies). And he offers rich critical commentary on the authority fetish at the heart of Hobbesian and Austinian theories of state power.<sup>10</sup>

Here, Smith points to the broad nature of Marx's critique of existing society, especially in terms of the largely uncritical acceptance of authority by most, in whatever form it takes. While he notes that Marx criticised the naïve acceptance by Maine and others of the ahistorical nature of patriarchal power, Smith does not discuss this further.

Anderson discusses a number of Marx's critiques of Maine.<sup>11</sup> This is especially true regarding Marx's criticism of Maine's understanding of communal property-forms, the patriarchal family and the development of the state. Most important for the present purposes, however, are Marx's notes on the

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<sup>8</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 184

<sup>9</sup> Smith 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Smith 2002, pp. 81–2.

<sup>11</sup> Anderson 2010.

development of the patriarchal family. As Anderson argues, 'Marx was to hammer Maine repeatedly for assuming the patriarchal family as the oldest and most basic form of social organization'.<sup>12</sup>

However, while Marx was often highly critical of Maine, there are some areas where he critically appropriated elements of Maine's work:

Marx's frequent attacks on Maine sometimes masked areas where he appropriated, albeit critically, some of the British jurist's data and arguments. These concerned especially (1) the rise of class differentiation within the Irish clan and (2) the rejection of the category of 'feudalism' as a generic term for premodern agrarian societies. However, for the most part he portrays Maine as an ideologue defending capital and empire, rather than a real scholar.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, in his notes on Maine, Marx often appropriated Maine's factual data for his own purposes, while criticising his conclusions.

#### *The patriarchal family and the clan*<sup>14</sup>

While Maine sees the original form of the family as based on patriarchal power, Marx, following Morgan, views the early patriarchal extended family developing gradually as a transitory stage from a society based on the clan to a politically based society with a monogamous family-structure. Throughout his notes, Marx criticises Maine for his failure to understand the importance of the clan in early societies, as well as a general lack of understanding of the modalities of change in these early societies. Since Maine's book had been published before Morgan's *Ancient Society*: "The following "extracts" demonstrate that Herr Maine had not yet been able to appropriate what Morgan had not yet printed, and furthermore that Maine seeks to describe matters which can already be found in *Nisibulr* and others as "pointed out" by the identical *Henry Sumner Maine*'!<sup>15</sup>

Next, Marx continues with his critique of Maine regarding the patriarchal joint family present in certain parts of India, where he argued against Maine's assertion that the joint family was one of the earliest forms of the family:

Herr Maine as a blockheaded Englishman does not start with the gens, but rather with the patriarch, who later becomes the Chief etc. Height of silliness.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson 2010, p. 205.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson 2010, p. 208.

<sup>14</sup> Here and below, I am using Smith's unpublished English translation of Marx's notes on Maine, using the same format as in the previous chapter for the Morgan notes. I have included page-numbers from the Krader transcription for reference purposes.

<sup>15</sup> Marx 1972, p. 288.

This is particularly apt for the oldest form of the gens! – this patriarch – for example, with the Iroquois described by Morgan (where the *gens* was by female descent!). The summit of Maine's idiocy [can be found] in the [final] sentence [of this Lecture]: 'Thus all the branches of human society may or may not have developed from *joint families*' (what he has in mind here is the current Hindu form as a model, even though, *outside of* the village communities in which it is dominant, it has a very secondary character, especially in the *cities*!) 'which arose out of an original patriarchal cell; but wherever the Joint Family is an Institution of the Aryan race (!), *we* (who?) see it springing from such a cell, and when it dissolves, we see it dissolving into a number of such cells'.<sup>16</sup>

Here, Marx points out that the patriarchal joint family cannot be the model for the original family, since this only corresponds to the Indian family in certain villages. If it were the primitive form of the family for all 'Aryan' societies, then it should be possible to see at least some traces of its existence elsewhere, but as Marx points out, even in Indian cities, there is little to illustrate that this was the original family-form. Again, despite a great deal of evidence to the contrary, Maine is unable to see beyond the patriarchal family of his own time.

Marx continues to criticise Maine's notion that the patriarchal family was the original form of the family. Marx returns to Morgan's argument about the existence of matriarchal clans, where he posits that it would be impossible for patriarchy to exist within this type of society. Morgan and Marx argued that it would be very difficult to exercise ultimate control over women if power was transmitted through them by matrilineal descent, although, *contra* Morgan and Marx, this does not necessarily mean that women had a great deal more power in matrilineal societies than in all patriarchal societies. Here, however, women would have the power of their relatives to protect them from the husband, who would likely be living among his wife's clan. Thus, the power-imbalance between men and women would not likely have been as great in a matrilineal society as in a patrilineal one.

Marx further criticises Maine for his inability to see beyond the modern family, and thus trying to judge the earlier form based on the later form:

The *entirely false representation* of *Maine*, that the *private family*, even in the form in which it exists in India – and indeed it does so more in the cities than in the rural areas and among the landlords more than among the truly working members of the village community – can be *regarded as the*

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<sup>16</sup> Marx 1972, p. 292.



basis upon which the *Sept* and *Gens* evolved, etc., is shown in the following passage. After he says that the 'power of distributing inheritances vested in the *Celtic Chiefs*' is the same institution reserved to the 'Hindoo father' in the *Mitakshara*, he continues: 'It is part of the prerogative' (the idiot misses the relationship between the gens and the tribe) 'belonging to the representative of the purest blood in the joint family, but in proportion as the *Joint Family*, *Sept*, or *Gens* becomes more artificial, the power of distribution tends more and more to look like mere administrative authority.' The matter is quite the reverse. For Maine, who after all is unable to forget the English private family, it appears that this entirely natural function of the Chief of the gens, later of [the] Tribe, natural just because he is Chief (and theoretically always 'elected'), is 'artificial' and 'mere administrative authority,' while in fact the arbitrary power of the modern *pater familias* is just as 'artificial,' as is the private family itself, from the archaic standpoint<sup>17</sup>

Thus Marx charges that Maine is generalising the existence of the private family based on one form of the Indian family that occurs primarily among the upper classes in the cities. There is not enough evidence to make the assertion that the clan evolved from the private family, since this form of the family only occurred on a limited and class-based foundation. Instead, there is evidence even within Maine's work to the contrary, in his discussion of inheritance-rights.

Marx also criticises Maine for his assertion that the clan-chief's distribution of property is based upon his power as the *paterfamilias*. Instead, Marx appears to see the beginning-stages of conflict between the principle of the clan and that of the private family. Initially, the power to dispose of the land belonging to the clan was likely in the hands of a number of people. Later, as the chief became more powerful, he gained this as an exclusive right, although it would likely still be based upon equal shares for all male members of the clan. Moreover, this only appeared as 'administrative authority' in the final stages of the transition to a patriarchally-based class-society, when the clan-principle was already in an advanced state of decay.

Here, as in a number of places in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, *The German Ideology* and *Capital*, Marx points out that 'natural' and 'artificial' conditions can only be determined based upon the specific social relations of production and the development of society. Each economic mode of production contains within it a certain range of possible social relations. The modern family would be an artificial and untenable social structure in this early period, just as the clan

<sup>17</sup> Marx 1972, p. 309.

appears to be an artificial institution in our own society. Here, Marx is arguing that the current form of the family is not the only possible one.<sup>18</sup>

Later, Marx addresses the institution of primogeniture, which Maine argues had to do with the increasing importance of a certain ruling family. Maine writes that, in previous times, when tribes were more often at war, it was necessary to have a more militarily-competent ruler, but later, as wars became less common, the family that held power began to become more influential, and primogeniture was the result. Marx, on the other hand, makes the point that property, and especially the growth of individuation in the clan, was much more important in social stratification:

The question is the gradual predominance – connected with the development of private property – of the *single family* as against the *gens*. The father's brother is nearer to him because of the common parentage than any of the sons of the father, thus the uncle of the sons is nearer than any one of the sons. Later when the children of the family divide the inheritance, and the gens already receives little or nothing from the inheritance, still for public functions as gens chief or tribal chief *the old gens rule remains predominant*; of necessity there arises a struggle between two principles.<sup>19</sup>

As Marx saw it, the increasing development of property and changing relations of production created contradictions that led to conflict within society. Individuals gained property at the expense of the clan, and these individuals took actions based upon a real conflict of interest that was developing between themselves and the clan to which they belonged. The resulting changes in inheritance-rights and other property-rights led to further individuation and conflict, resulting in the predominance of the individual family over the clan, to the point of the elimination of the clan altogether. At least at this early stage of development, the family was an important element in the struggle of some individuals against the social system where the clan was predominant. Primogeniture became increasingly important in many societies because it was a means to assert the dominance of the *paterfamilias* over the clan, and not because of any natural predisposition to give property to one's own male offspring.

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<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, it can be inferred from the above that the family would have to change a great deal in any postcapitalist society.

<sup>19</sup> Marx 1972, p. 311.

### *Fosterage and the ancient-Irish family*

One of the most interesting passages regarding the family in Marx's notes involves the ancient practice of fosterage of Irish children. This was a highly regulated practice in which parents would send their children to others in order to have the child educated and trained for a particular trade. Maine describes the practice as follows:

An entire sub-tract in the *Senchus Mor* is devoted to the Law of Fosterage, and sets out with the greatest minuteness the rights and duties attaching to all parties when the children of another family were received for nurture and education. It is classed, with *Gossipred*, as one of the anomalies or curses of Ireland by all her English critics, from Giraldus *Camprensis* in the twelfth century to Spenser in the sixteenth. It seemed to them monstrous that the same mother's milk should produce in Ireland the same close affections as did common paternity in their own country. The true explanation was one which is only now dawning on us. It was, that Fosterage was an institution which, though artificial in its commencements, was natural in its operations; and that the relation of foster-parent and foster-child tended, in that stage of feeling, to become indistinguishable from the relation of father and son.<sup>20</sup>

While Marx's comments on this are very brief, it appears that he took a much different view of the practice than Maine:

'An entire sub-tract in the *Senchus Mor* [is] devoted to the Law of Fosterage, [and sets out] with the greatest minuteness the rights and duties attaching to all parties when the children of another family were received for nurture and education.' This classed with '*Gossipred*,' religious kinship. (The same mother's milk given to children of different origin. This reminds one of *Mother Right* and the rules flowing from it; but *Maine* is still unaware of this, it seems.)<sup>21</sup>

Here, Marx summarises the major aspects of the practice as discussed by Maine, but he appears to see it as a remnant of mother-right, while Maine appears to see it as an unusual and particularly Irish custom. Marx is able to account for this difference because he is aware of the theories of mother-right from Bachofen and Morgan. Again, for Marx, Maine's error is that he uncritically assumes that patriarchal authority has always existed, at least in part because he believes that fathers have always seen their children as theirs, and thus would by nature expect the children to be under their authority.

<sup>20</sup> Maine 1875, pp. 241–2.

<sup>21</sup> Marx 1972, p. 314.

On the other hand, Marx and other proponents of mother-right, regardless of the exact accuracy of their claims, are better able to account for practices such as fosterage because they do not assume the role of the father and mother to be based on a static concept of what is natural. Instead, these roles are created through wider social relationships that change depending on social and historical circumstances.

Marx's critique of Maine is particularly relevant in this case, since he appears to again question the common assumption of 'natural' as a static rather than a dynamic process, in this case with regard to the history of the family. Where Maine writes that 'Fosterage was an institution which, though artificial in its commencements, was natural in its operations',<sup>22</sup> assuming that the family was ahistorically 'natural' while fosterage, based on non-familial relationships, was 'artificial', Marx sees something much different. Here, Marx appears both to chide Maine for his patriarchal assumptions and at the same time point out that fosterage was not an 'artificial' institution, but more likely a remnant of mother-right. He does this by not adding to his notes Maine's references to the 'artificial' nature of fosterage, and instead substituting his own view: '(The *same mother's milk* given to children of different origin. This reminds one of *Mother Right* and the rules flowing from it; but *Maine* is still unaware of this, it seems.)'

Viewing Irish fosterage and mother-right as similar institutions at least points in the direction of Marx changing his perceptions on biologically-based roles for women, towards an understanding of a more socially-mediated understanding of women's roles. While mothers breast-feeding their children or other's children hardly qualifies as a non-biological division of labour, Marx appears to be looking at both the biological and social aspects of each process. It is not just breast-feeding that Marx is interested in. The different social institutions based on mother-right are relevant as well, although he does not detail them here with regard to gender. Instead, he focuses on the contradictions within mother-right that could have led to patriarchy.

Marx notes both the problems and possibilities inherent within fosterage in ancient-Irish society. On the one hand, as Marx extracts from Maine's text, there is a tendency for these associations to become a caste: '... anyone who went through a particular training might become a Brehon. <At the time> when Ireland began to be examined by English observers... the art and knowledge of the Brehon had become *hereditary in certain families*... attached to or dependent on the Chiefs of particular tribes'.<sup>23</sup> When the clan was predominant, it

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<sup>22</sup> Maine 1875, p. 242.

<sup>23</sup> Marx 1972, p. 314.

was possible for fosterage to occur without developing into a caste, since the children of the Brehons would not be valued by the lawyers above the other children of the clan. Later, as private family developed, as opposed to the clan, the Brehon children would be favoured by their parents for transmission of this knowledge regardless of ability, since the Brehons had a relatively powerful place in ancient-Irish society.

On the other hand, fosterage provides evidence of a relatively egalitarian form of communality at work that is not based upon the biological family. Marx notes this in an earlier passage that he pulled from Haverty's *History of Ireland*: "'if any love or faith is to be found among them" <the Irish>, "you must look for it among the fosterers and their foster-children." <Stanilhurst... says the Irish loved and confided in their foster-brothers more than their brothers by blood>'.<sup>24</sup> This, in addition to the clan, provides evidence of close personal relationships developing other than those dominated by the modern family, with its patriarchal origins, or the reified social relations of modern capitalist society. Thus, it would seem possible to move beyond the modern family since it is not a permanent feature of human society. Instead, it is one form of maintaining communality in a particular social system.

Moreover, in this as well as a number of other cases in his notebooks on ethnology, Marx appears to take a somewhat different position on the role of the mother in the upbringing of children than in his earlier writings, and especially in terms of some of the more problematic passages in *Capital* where he notes the 'deterioration of character' of women in capitalist society due to their introduction into the workforce. While it could be argued that in *Capital* Marx occasionally takes a somewhat traditional view of women's role in the family, and is at least implicitly providing a critique of women entering the workforce, it is possible that Marx was reevaluating his position in that regard in the 1880s. There are, certainly, passages within *Capital* that support the notion that Marx was at least ambivalent about the changing role of women, but, with his new understanding of the history of the family in these later notebooks, he appears to move further in the direction of abandoning any lingering notions of a fixed biological essence of childrearing, in favour of one in which biological necessity must be mediated through social relations. However, since he did not write up this material for publication, either as a separate work or for revisions to *Capital*, it is impossible to say with any degree of certainty to what extent his position on these issues may have changed.

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<sup>24</sup> Marx 1972, p. 304.

*The position of women in ancient-Irish society*

Marx's notes on Maine also contain an important discussion of the position of women in ancient-Irish society. While Maine's discussion of Irish women is relatively brief, Marx takes notes on a few passages where it is clear that the position of women in Irish society was much better in many ways during the period of the *Book of Aicill*, probably written around the eighth century, than after English colonisation:

'The *Book of Aicill* provides for the legitimisation not only of the bastard, but of the adulterine bastard, and measures the compensation to be paid to the putative father. The tract on "*Social Connections*" appears to assume that the *temporary cohabitation of the sexes* is part of the accustomed order of society, and on this assumption it minutely regulates the mutual rights of the parties, showing an especial care for the rights of the woman, even to the extent of reserving to her the value of her domestic services during her residence in the *common dwelling*.' This '...tract on "*Social Connections*" notices a "*first*" wife.' This Maine takes for the Church influence, although it arises everywhere in the higher state of savagery, for instance among Red Indians. 'The common view seems to have been that' (the Christian) 'chastity [was] the professional virtue of a special class' (monk, bishop, etc.)<sup>25</sup>

Maine's text, as Marx indicates, contains contradictions. Instead of early Christianity having a positive influence on the position of Irish women, Marx sees it as much more likely that the patriarchal family did not yet exist at this time. Here, Marx notes the similarities between the position of women in ancient-Irish and Iroquois society, which were both based on matrilineal descent and where women had some power in clan- and tribe-governance.

Marx notes the evidence for the view that women's position in precolonial Ireland indicates the non-patriarchal origins of these societies. For example, women's reproductive capacities are not viewed as under the control of one man, or even the dominant men in society. There is an ideal of 'temporary cohabitation' instead of the one of lifetime-marriage. Furthermore, children are not the property of the father. There is no social penalty for adultery for the woman or the child. Instead, it is only the case that the biological father, if known to be different than the male with which the child is living, must support the child. Thus, in this early society, there is little basis for assuming that the patriarchal family is in existence. Instead, women appear to have a relatively equal amount of power in dealing with family-matters.

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<sup>25</sup> Marx 1972, p. 288.

Perhaps most interestingly for the position of women in this society are the provisions for 'reserving to her the value of her domestic services during her residence in the common dwelling.' Domestic work is here seen as primarily, if not completely, women's work, but this does not necessarily imply that women do not have more power, even within this division of labour, than their modern counterparts that remain in the domestic sphere. Here, in contrast to modern society where domestic work is devalued, the ancient-Irish specifically recognised and rewarded the value of this work.

While Marx does not comment further on this, at a later point in his notes, he returns to the issue. In the chapter 'The Early History of the Settled Property of Married Women', Marx makes one of his most feminist statements anywhere in his writings, seemingly arguing that restricting women's rights in any way is unacceptable. Marx bemoans the retrogressive nature of English colonial legislation with regard to gender and the family: 'According to "...the *ancient Irish Law*...[married] women...had some power of *dealing with their own property without the consent of their husbands*, and this [was] one of the institutions *expressly declared by the <English blockheaded>*<sup>26</sup> *Judges to be illegal at the beginning of the seventeenth century*"'.<sup>27</sup>

Here, Marx points to the retrogressive nature of British colonial law in Ireland with regard to women's property-rights. Other than referring to the judges as 'blockheaded', Marx does not directly comment on this significant change in the law. However, he does seem to suggest that this premodern Irish law was superior to English law, since it gave women at least some rights. Thus, for Marx, it is not simply a matter of a more technologically advanced society conquering and progressively transforming that society, as he and Engels had argued in relation to China in *The Communist Manifesto*; instead, Marx appears to be pointing to the need to look more closely at communal societies as a partial model for the future.<sup>28</sup> While it certainly cannot be said that Marx saw these societies as a model to be copied – as evidenced by his discussion of Morgan – it does appear that he saw some possible points for departure in theorising a new society, at least with regard to the position of women in these societies.

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<sup>26</sup> This is Marx's addition

<sup>27</sup> Marx 1972, p. 323.

<sup>28</sup> This was something that Marx addresses in a few other places in his late writings such as the 1882 preface to *The Communist Manifesto* and a letter (and drafts of a letter) to Russian socialist Vera Zasulich. For more on this, see Shanin 1983, Dunayevskaya 1991 and Anderson 2010.

### *Women's property-rights in Indian society*

As in other parts of his notes on Maine, Marx criticises him for his lack of understanding of premodern property-forms and for failing to see that the position of women, especially with regard to property, has varied a great deal over time. This is especially evident in Maine's treatment of the history of *Stridhan* property in India.

According to the *Mitakshara*, a compendium of early Hindu law, the *Stridhan* is 'That [property] which is given (to the wife) by the father, the mother, the husband, or a brother, at the time of the wedding, before the nuptial fire'.<sup>29</sup> While this is not problematic for Maine's theory of the origin of the family in patriarchy, a different discussion within the *Mitakshara* proves to be much more difficult for Maine to account for, '[A]ll the property which a woman may have acquired by inheritance, purchase, partition, seizure, or finding' is also included as part of the *Stridhan*.<sup>30</sup> Maine points out that this 'is a comprehensive description of all the forms of property as defined by the modes of acquisition, and, if all this be *Stridhan*, it follows that the ancient Hindoo law secured to married women, in theory at all events, an even greater degree of proprietary independence than that given to them by the modern English Married Women's Property Act'.<sup>31</sup> Thus, he concedes that premodern Indian women's property-rights were greater than those of nineteenth-century English women.

This, however, undermines Maine's argument that Indian society was initially patriarchal, and to a great extent remained as such. Maine himself points out that it is difficult to explain why 'the obligations of the family despotism were relaxed in this one particular'.<sup>32</sup> Marx provides an alternative explanation, while strongly attacking Maine's notion that the original family-form was patriarchal:

The tendency of Indian legislation towards women, which until now has made the *Stridhan* ('settled property of a married woman') 'incapable of alienation by her husband,' indeed this is pledged that the property of the married woman goes to the daughters or to the female members of her family... all this Herr Maine does not rightly understand, he lacks any insight into the *gens* and thus the *original hereditary transmission* through *female* – not *male* – *line of descent*. The ass shows with which *colored spectacles* he sees when he says: 'Among the Aryan' (the devil take this 'Aryan'

<sup>29</sup> Cited in Maine 1875, pp. 321–2.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Maine 1875, p. 322.

<sup>31</sup> Maine 1875, p. 322.

<sup>32</sup> Maine 1875, p. 323.



cant!) 'sub-races, the *Hindoos* may be as confidently asserted as the *Romans* to have had their society organized as a collection of patriarchally governed families' (From Niebuhr he could have already discovered that the *Roman family* was still enmeshed in the *gens* even after it had developed its own specific form, the *patria potestas*) 'If, then,' (a nice 'If' only resting upon Maine's own 'confident assertion') 'then,' (this 'then' Pecksniffian), 'at any early period,' (Maine transports his 'patriarchal' Roman family into the very beginning of things) 'the married woman had among the *Hindoos* her property altogether enfranchised from her husband's control' ('enfranchised,' that is to say, from Maine's 'confident assertion'), 'it is not easy to give a reason why the obligations of the family despotism' (a principle pet-doctrine of blockheaded John Bull to read in original 'despotism') 'were relaxed in this one particular'.<sup>38</sup>

Influenced by Morgan, Marx argues here that earlier forms of the family were not patriarchal, but, rather, were based on the clan. This was even the case in Rome where a specific form of patriarchal authority had developed alongside the clan. In addition, Marx distances himself from Maine's racist talk of 'Aryans' and 'sub-races'.

Having already read and appropriated elements of Morgan's theory of the clan and the shift from matrilineal to patrilineal society, Marx posits, *contra* Maine, that those elements of the *Stridhan* that transfer property from women to their female relatives are not a relaxation of stricter patriarchal property-laws. Instead, he argues that it is much more likely that it is a remnant of an earlier form of property-transmission from the period of matrilineal descent. In Marx's eyes, Maine offers an ahistorical model in which the Roman patriarchal family is made into the original form of the family. Thus, Marx argues that because Maine sees the family-form as relatively static and without a history of its own, Maine can find no way to account for the change other than as an altruistic action on the part of the men in power.

Marx points to an additional error in Maine's thinking regarding the nature of ancient-Roman society. While Rome was moving in the direction of relatively autonomous patriarchally-based families, Marx points out that even Niebuhr (someone Marx criticised harshly in his Morgan notes for his patriarchal assumptions) argued that the clan was a significant element in early Roman society. Thus, even the Roman family, known for its particular form of *patria potestas*, can only be understood in the context of the conflict between the clan and the *patres familias*, according to Marx. This is something that Maine glossed over, because he saw the patriarchal family as the 'natural' form of

<sup>38</sup> Marx 1972, p. 324.

the family and the clan as an artificial construct. In contrast, Marx, here and elsewhere in his notes, appears to view the family as a developing institution that has taken a variety of forms, none of which is necessarily more 'natural' than the others when viewed in the context of the material conditions of a given period.

Marx is much better able to explain the laws on women's property in the Hindu *Stridhan*. These laws were so different from other patriarchal societies because they were left over from the period of the more egalitarian matrilineal clan, where the position of women was more powerful. Therefore, the origins of society cannot be traced to patriarchal families where property and other members of the family were controlled by the *paterfamilias*. Rather, at one point, society exhibited greater gender-equality, and over time, through a variety of developments, this was undermined, creating the material conditions for the patriarchal family of the Roman type.

Unhappy with Maine's explanation, Marx goes to another source, Thomas Strange's *Hindu Law*, for more information on women's property in India. From Strange, he takes down the following:

'The *fee* of a Hindu wife has moreover this *anomaly* attending it, that, upon her death, it descends in a *course of inheritance peculiar to herself*.' This '*anomaly*' is only a fragmentary *survival*, covering only a small part of the total property, of the older *normal rule* among primitives which was based on *descent within the gens along the female line*. So it is frequently with '*anomalies*' in the law. (In a language as well *exceptions* are frequently *remnants* of the older, more original ) The old norm appears relative to the modern situation as an anomaly, an incomprehensible *exception*. Without fail, the Indian legal sources and commentaries write about *descent in the female line* long after this has been transformed into *descent in the male line*. (From Strange it furthermore can be seen that in *different parts of India* these *anomalies* are to a greater or lesser extent '*complete*' remnants of the past )<sup>24</sup>

Here, again, Marx finds more evidence of the existence of the matrilineal clan. These supposed anomalies are simply those rules from earlier times that had not yet completely disappeared. At some earlier point, it appears that women were able to own and control their own property. Marx, through his use of Strange, is again pointing to the existence of a significant change of social relations that had not yet been entirely completed – the change

<sup>24</sup> Marx 1972, pp. 324–5. The passages in parentheses are Marx's additions to a long quote from Strange.

from matrilineal to patrilineal descent – along with its deleterious effects on women's position in society, at least in terms of property-rights.

Moreover, as Marx notes, there is a significant difference in the level of development of patrilineal descent in different locations. This would probably indicate that the change from matrilineal to patrilineal descent was more difficult in some places than others due to the differential power of women, as I argue more fully below. In those parts of India where 'these *anomalies are to a greater... extent "complete" remnants of the past*' it is likely that patriarchal institutions are less developed. Thus, at least indirectly, Marx points to the position of women as important in accounting for social change. They are far from simply passive victims of this change.

Before moving on to Maine's discussion of *Suttee* and its place in Indian society, Marx criticises one more passage on women's property and the bride-price.

On this [the bride-price] there were 'vehement controversies among the [later] Brahminical commentators... ' The cunning Maine explains this matter as follows: 'Among the Aryan communities [as a whole we find] the earliest traces of the separate property of women in the widely diffused ancient institution known as [the] *Bride-Price*. Part of this price, which was paid by the bridegroom either at the wedding or the day after it, went to the bride's father as *compensation (!) for the Patriarchal or Family authority which was transferred to the husband*, but another part went to the bride herself and was generally enjoyed by her separately and kept apart from her husband's property. It further appears that under a certain number of Aryan customs the *propriety rights of other kinds which women slowly acquired were assimilated to their rights in their portion of the Bride-Price*, probably (!) as being the only existing type of women's property'.<sup>35</sup>

In the above passage, Marx's exclamation-mark is used to question two significant points made by Maine. In the first case, Marx appears to point out that there was no need for the father to be compensated for a loss of his patriarchal authority, since that authority likely did not exist at the time. Instead, it is much more likely that patriarchal authority developed at least in part out of his access to part of the bride-price. It was in the father's interest to ensure that his daughter was married to a man from a wealthy family. This would mean a greater sum of money for him and the remaining members of the family. Therefore, it is likely that arranged marriages took on more and more of a form of selling the daughter to another family, without any significant

<sup>35</sup> Marx 1972, p. 325.

input from the pair that were being married. Moreover, if this practice was compensation for anyone, it was more likely that it was the woman being married who was being compensated for leaving her own clan and entering into another. Here, she would have much less power and no chance for an inheritance from her own clan, since under the rules of patrilineal society any property would leave her clan and pass into the clan of her husband at her death.

In the second case, Marx's exclamation-point again seems to target Maine's faulty patriarchal assumptions. The bride-price was not women's first and only form of property. Instead of women slowly acquiring property-rights over time, beginning with the bride-price, it is more likely that the bride-price was the only type of property still available to women after the change from matrilineal to patrilineal descent.

Marx continues with Maine's discussion of the bride-price and its relation to Brahminical property-law: 'About this Maine rightly says: "There are in fact clear indications of a sustained *general effort on the part of the Brahminical writers on mixed law and religion*, to limit the privileges of women which they seem to have found *recognized by older authorities*.'" In Rome as well the attitude within *patria potestas vis-à-vis* the woman was exaggerated in opposition to the old *contrary tradition*'.<sup>30</sup> Here is one of the rare passages where Marx praises Maine for at least some insight into Indian society. The Brahmins were inimical to the rights of women in terms of property-ownership, and created laws that placed restrictions on them that had not existed in the past. Marx then makes a comparison between these laws and Roman patriarchal laws. It was necessary to institute harsh laws at first to limit the power that women had had in earlier times. Instead of women just accepting their lower position, it is likely that they made efforts to regain their power: otherwise, such strict laws would not be necessary. Thus, it was the memory of their previous status and their unwillingness to give up this power that necessitated such strict laws.

The above passages resemble his earlier comments in the notes on Morgan regarding ancient-Greek efforts to force women to accept a lower status by confining them to the home, in which he also noted the extreme measures necessary to carry this out. In these cases, as Marx pointed out with the example of Athena, older tradition provided an example of women's former power, potentially illustrating the socially-constructed nature of the ideology of women's inferiority. In contrast to simply arguing that women were in a worse position and without any agency to change their position, in both of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

these cases, Marx, suggests the possibility of a prolonged social conflict which forced women into an inferior position.

### *Suttee in Indian society*

Marx moves from women's property to a discussion of *Suttee* [*sati*] and its relation to religion and property. *Suttee*, or widow-burning, which Maine believed to be a relatively common practice in India, involved a widow burning herself to death when her husband died. In contrast to those who saw this as a brutal tradition rooted in a backward culture, Marx, while certainly critical of the custom, finds a material explanation for the *Suttee* and argues that this is actually a relatively new phenomena not directly tied to earlier practices:

The beastliness of the Brahmans reaches its height in the 'Suttee' or widow burning. Strange considers this practice to be a 'malus usus,' not 'law,' since in the *Manu* and other high authorities there is no mention of it; these 'as the condition on which the widow may aspire to Heaven' have simply required that she should, on the decease of her husband, live a life of seclusion, privation, and decency.' In the *Shaster* also the *suttee* is only recommended. But see above where the *Brahmins* themselves clarify the matter ('property designed for religious uses') and the interest these fellows have in receiving the inheritance (they therefore have to pay the expenses of the ceremonial). Strange speaks expressly of 'designing Brahmins' and 'interested relatives'.<sup>37</sup>

Widow-burning was thus not part of earliest religious law, at least under the *Mitakshara*, but the Brahmins did have an important reason for encouraging the practice. Marx alludes to it in the above passage with his parenthetical reference to 'property designated for religious uses'. Here, he is referring to where Maine's text quotes the *Mitakshara* on the relationship between men and women, in terms of giving property to the Brahmins upon their death: 'The wealth of a regenerate man is designed for religious uses, and a woman's succession to such property is unfit because she is not competent to the performance of religious rites'.<sup>38</sup> Thus, upon the death of her husband, a woman could not give property for the religious ceremonies to the Brahmins, because she was unfit according to Hindu doctrine. On the other hand, his male children or other male relatives were competent to perform this task.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Maine 1875, pp. 332-3.

This would not be a problem if there was a son to inherit the property of the deceased, but if there was not, the law still stated that his property would go to the wife. Marx provides his own materialist reading of the *Suttee*:

Namely: 'the wife surviving her husband, succeeds as heir to him, in default of male issue' . . . With the exception of the '*Stridhana*,' which she owns in her own right, everything which the wife inherits from the husband (in so far as he had no male issue), goes upon her death to her husband's heirs, not the immediate ones merely, but the whole living at the time. The matter is clear: the *suttee* is simply religious murder, in part to bring the inheritance into the hands of the (spiritual) Brahmins for the religious ceremonies for the deceased husband and in part through Brahmin legislation to transfer the inheritance of the widow to the closest in the gens, the nearer family of the husband. Hence the violence and infamies, usually on the part of the 'connexions,' to bring the widow to a flaming death.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, both the Brahmins and the male relatives of the deceased had a strong material interest in assuring that the property of the deceased husband did not go to his wife, since neither could gain access to it until her death. According to the law, women could not give the property to the Brahmins and the property that she inherited went to all men in her husband's clan. Thus, the easiest way to gain access to this property, both for the Brahmins and for the close relatives of the deceased husband, was through the death of the widow.

This became a major concern in Bengal because of the specific conditions in the province: "At the present moment, marriages among the upper classes of Hindoo being very commonly infertile, a <very> considerable portion of the wealthiest Indian province <Bengal> is in the hands of [childless] widows as tenants for life. But it was exactly in Bengal Proper that the English, on entering India, found the *Suttee*, not merely an occasional, but a constant and almost universal practice with the wealthier classes . . . and, as a rule, it was only the childless widow, and never the widow with minor children, who burnt herself on her husband's funeral pyre".<sup>40</sup> Since Bengal was the wealthiest province, the male relatives of the husband and the Brahmins would have the most to lose if there were no male heir. There was also a very strong correlation between a wealthy widow not having a male heir and the practice of *Suttee*. For those without much property or at least one potential male heir, there was no economic motive for the practice, and thus it was rarely found in these cases. Here, Marx and

<sup>39</sup> Marx 1972, p. 326.

<sup>40</sup> Marx 1972, pp. 326–7.

Strange seem to point to the relationship between economic interest and this religious practice.

In a later passage, Marx distances himself somewhat from Maine's arguments on the *Suttas* through his insertion of comments into the text:

'There is no question that there was the closest connection between the law and the religious custom, and the widow was made to sacrifice herself in order that *her tenancy for life might be got out of the way*. The anxiety of *her family*' (on the contrary: *of her husband's family*, who inherited; only the *female members of her family* were interested in her *Stridhana*, the rest of her family could only be interested in the outcome through religious fanaticism or the influence of the Brahmins) 'that the rite should be performed, which seemed so striking to the first English observers of the practice, was, in fact, explained by the coarsest motives; but the *Brahmins*' (besides the ecclesiastical Brahmins, the relatives of the husband could, especially in the higher classes, be very largely composed of *worldly Brahmins*!) 'who exhorted her to the sacrifice were undoubtedly' (! naive Maine!) 'influenced by a purely professional dislike to her enjoyment to property. The ancient' (i.e. also a modified survival from the archaic) 'rule of the civil law, which made her tenant for life, could not be got rid of, but it was combated by the modern institution which made it her duty to devote herself to a frightful death'.<sup>41</sup>

While Maine puts more emphasis on religious custom, Marx, by underlining the phrase in the first sentence pointing to the economic motives, emphasises the importance of getting around the inheritance-laws of the time. Furthermore, Marx correctly points out that the widow's family has no reason other than purely religious motives to convince her to engage in the practice. The Brahmins and the deceased's relatives, on the other hand, have strong economic motives for encouraging the practice, since they are the ones that will gain access to the property immediately after her death, instead of waiting for her to die naturally and being forced to share it with the rest of the clan.

Thus, Marx emphasises the material interest that both the Brahmins and the deceased's family have in the *Suttas*. For him, it is not a question of a traditional prejudice towards women: rather, those who would benefit from the death of the wife saw the need to change the law on inheritance. Since this was not possible at the time, the other option available was to use a mixture of tradition and force to compel a new practice into existence:

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<sup>41</sup> Marx 1972, p. 327.

'Although *Suttee* was an *innovation* introduced by the Brahmins, in the Brahmin mind this *innovation* was conceived as a survival from the older barbarians' (who had buried a man with his possessions)! Let it rest. This ancient atrocity was revived in priestly heads and then naively attributed to its ancient origins<sup>42</sup>

Here, Marx bitterly criticises the ancient Brahmins for their argument that this was a practice based upon religious tradition, and not an invention to circumvent women's property-rights without the use of direct force. Instead, the Brahmins could use their position as religious authorities to convince women that the practice was based upon tradition and was what truly religious women were supposed to do.

Marx's discussion of the *Suttee* provides an interesting challenge to cultural relativism. On the one hand, the relativist would argue that, while the practice of widow-burning may seem morally reprehensible, it is part of Indian culture and must be respected. It is not for Westerners who have their own forms of oppression to judge others. This type of argument sees culture as an abstract and static concept. On the other hand, Marx's formulation sees culture as a dynamic and contested process. In this case, the practice of widow-burning exists because of a variety of material factors, including the interests of the male relatives, the state of the law at the time, and the declining position of women. Thus, according to Marx, culture needs to be historicised and seen as a process of struggle between different interests. There is not one static Indian culture: rather, Indian culture is constantly changing through the struggle of dominant and oppressed groups within society. Therefore, to take the current condition of Indian society as Indian culture *tout court* is incorrect both currently and historically.

Marx then makes a final remark in this chapter in regard to the influence that the Christian Church in the West had on the position of women:

When Herr Maine says 'There can be no serious question that, in its ultimate result, the *disruption of the Roman Empire* was very unfavorable to the personal and proprietary liberty of women', the damned thing should be taken with a grain of salt. He says: '... the place of women under the *new system* (the barbarians) when fully organized (that is, according to the development of the feudal system) was worse than it was under Roman law and *would have been very greatly worse but for the efforts of the Church*.' This is tasteless and inept, considering that the Church blocked *divorce*, or made it as difficult as possible, and viewed matrimony, although a sacrament, as a transgression.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



In relation to 'proprietary rights' the wily church certainly had an interest in securing the rights of women (the opposite interest from the Brahmins!)<sup>43</sup>

Contrary to Maine, Marx argues that the Church had, if anything, a negative effect on the position of women in these societies with its policy against divorce and its repressive ideology regarding all forms of sexuality. Moreover, he disagrees with Maine's attempt to show the superiority of Western Christianity to Hinduism with respect to women's rights.

Here, Marx notes the Christian Church's contradictory position with regard to the material versus the spiritual realm. When it was a matter of controlling the acceptable means of procreation, the Church made a largely spiritually-based argument. Indissoluble marriage was the only proper means of expressing sexuality. However, this was only the case because marriage was a necessary evil, based upon humanity's less-important material, bodily nature. Women as child-bearers would necessarily be seen by the Christian Church as more worldly, and thus denigrated. On the other hand, the Church was willing to argue that women had enough rationality to take care of their own property, since they could potentially profit from women's worldly goods after their death.

### Marx's notebooks on Ludwig Lange's *Römische Alterthümer*

Ludwig Lange's *Römische Alterthümer* ('Ancient Rome'), Volume I deals with a number of topics on ancient-Roman society, including its structure in the pre-republican period; the power of the *paterfamilias* over relatives, slaves and property; marriage-law; and the development of state-institutions and their effect on the power of the *paterfamilias*.<sup>44</sup> Marx's notes on Lange tend to contain a much larger proportion of direct quotes and paraphrases – rather than criticisms in his own words – than was the case with his notes on Maine.<sup>45</sup>

While these notes were taken in 1879, prior to his notes on Morgan, Marx appears to have already had some familiarity with Morgan's argument on the origin of early societies in the clan. Like Maine, Lange viewed the individual patriarchal family as the primary unit of the first communities. In several places, Marx criticises Lange for his lack of understanding of the origin of the clan. For example, when taking down Lange's discussion of the *ager*

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Lange 1856

<sup>45</sup> Here and below, I am using the forthcoming English translation of these previously unpublished notes, generously provided to me by the translators of this volume of the MEGA project.

*publicus* (communal land), Marx argues that Lange has the historical development in this regard backwards. While Lange sees the individual family as occurring earlier than the clan, and individual property as the first form of property, Marx asserts that this is incorrect. Instead, it was the clan and communal property that came first, while individuation of both the family and property only came later.

Lange's book provides a detailed account of the history and development of Rome, from its origins through to its imperial period and eventual downfall. It seems that Marx was dialectically tracing the contradictions and development in this society based on the slave-mode of production. Particularly important for this study are what appear to be Marx's efforts to track dialectically the contradictions within the patriarchal family itself, and the role that this played in the development of the Roman state. This can potentially provide a general model for understanding the intersectional nature of gender and class in capitalist societies as well.

### *Class-conflict, the development of the state and the position of women*

At a general level, Marx's notes on Lange explore the development of class-divisions and conflict, from the increasing individuation of the *paterfamilias* and members of the patrician families to the conflict with plebeians and the subsequent development of the state to mitigate this conflict. Early-Roman society was significantly influenced by the conflict between two forms of ordering society – the clan, or else individual patriarchal families with the *paterfamilias* governing the entire family. In addition, a significant portion of Marx's notes on Lange deal with the evolving relationships of the patrician-patriarchal family to the plebeian-patriarchal family (which could not be included in patrician family-law) and the state, as well as the role that these conflicts played in undermining the traditional Roman family in favour of greater individual rights for both men and women.

Early in his notes on the family based on Lange's book, Marx sets down a definition of the Roman family. In contrast to the modern nuclear family, the Roman concept of family had a much broader application that included the entire household. Here, Marx notes that the ancient-Roman family referred primarily to the *paterfamilias* and his property, rather than to only biological relatives. Marx emphasises that the *paterfamilias* had a great deal of power over the persons and property in his household.

Moreover, Marx notes the extended nature of the family, as well as the extensive power that the *paterfamilias* had over the rest of the family. The state is developed very little here, in the sense that any dealings outside of the family are based upon the law of nations, rather than that of uniform state-laws.

Furthermore, Marx, through his parenthetical use of the question-mark, seems to point to an important difference with Lange. While Lange argues that the individual family came first and evolved into the clan, Marx posited that at this point, sacral law was based on a formation older than the family – the clan. The individual families themselves likely had no separate sacral laws; instead, the conflict between the clan and the family took place as the individual families, and especially the *paterfamilias*, sought to free themselves from the clan based on sacral law. Finally, Marx points out evidence of a fault-line within the family, since citizenship was not limited to the *paterfamilias*, but also extended to his male relatives, giving them some public power at the expense of the *paterfamilias*.

Marx continues his brief overview of the development of conflict within the Roman family and society at large by recording from Lange a discussion of the role that the plebeians would play. Since the Roman state was originally founded solely by its members' inclusion in the patrician order, the inclusion of non-patrician families with different family-laws would have a significant effect on the state over time. Sacral family-law was no longer enough, since due to their status the plebeians could not be incorporated into this very exclusive form of law.

A state that was based on more general principles was needed, and sacral law declined as the state gained power. The inclusion of persons not subject to traditional Roman law would have a number of effects on the position of upper-class women as the state began to take over as the primary policymaker.

#### *Arrogation, Patria Potestas and women*

One of the most significant powers that the *paterfamilias* had over his family was that of *patria potestas*, or the power over his children. As was the case with *manus* for women (discussed below), this power included almost complete property-rights over the child, including earnings and even the right to sell the child. However, it was not necessary for the child to be the biological offspring of the *paterfamilias* in order to fall under his *potestas*. Adoption in the form of arrogation for the purpose of perpetuating the family-cult was also allowed under traditional Roman law. Arrogation could only take place when an adult male was involved, and was not available to women under any circumstances.

Marx notes how a practice that was initially intended to preserve the sacred family-cult eventually served to help undermine the power of the father. Prior to the development of this practice, the father could sell his children, but could never relinquish complete power over them, since he only sold their earning-power and not his *potestas* over them. Arrogation, on the other hand, gave

the father the power to completely eliminate that relationship with his son and grant it to another. Thus, although the father – now able to have his son adopted by someone else – gained an additional right, in the long term this became a means to dissolve the sacral family. If sacral law could be dissolved in this case, there was little reason to question other similar exceptions. It later became a means to challenge the authority of the *paterfamilias* over his sons, since the family was no longer theoretically indissoluble.

Later, Marx notes, however, that, even initially, the indissolubility of the family was never complete, given the status of women. Since the family did not live in complete isolation, and since it was based on an exogamous patrilinealism, the presence of women would be enough to ensure that total inalienability was not possible. Women in this type of society would always be married into other families, thus being alienable. Thus, it was the social position of women in societies based on father-right that provided the first exception to the theoretical indissolubility of the family. This early contradiction seems to point in the direction of development beyond the confines of a clan-based society, towards something with more universal applicability.

Moreover, Marx's notes compare marriage-law with commercial law. Just as the family is not a completely self-sustaining unit in terms of its self-perpetuation, it is also not a self-sustaining unit with regard to the production of goods. Here, Marx seems to suggest that some form of sociality is necessary outside of the confines of the family. Thus, the seeds of its own destruction were already present in this self-contained form of the family. This, as well as conflict between the state and the family, will be discussed further below.

### *Marriage and Manus*

One of the most significant areas of change in women's status in Roman society involved their husband's control over them. Initially, when Roman women married, they went directly from the control of their fathers to the control of their husbands or the *paterfamilias* of their husband. This power, known as *manus*, gave the man almost absolute authority over the woman. As Marx's notes from Lange record, *manus* includes a variety of powers such as complete property-rights over her and the right to physical punishment, including, in some cases, the power to kill the wife. However, as Marx notes, this power was never absolute. The husband could only exercise this power with the consent of the relatives – probably a remnant of the more egalitarian clan. This power was further limited later on, when she could only be killed unconditionally for committing adultery. Moreover, Marx points to the property-like nature of *manus*. While the husband could legally sell his

wife, he could not alienate his rights regarding *manus*. Instead, the buyer only had control over whatever the woman could produce, while her husband continued to maintain control over her person.

Over time, however, marriage with *manus* became less of the norm, due to a variety of factors. One of the most important of these was the conflict between the patricians and the plebeians. Prior to the introduction of the plebeians into the state, the sacral family-law of the patricians was the only recognised form of law with regard to marriage. However, when certain plebeian families were granted patrician status in the state, sacral family-law was no longer applicable, and a new form of *connubium* [marriage-laws] had to be created. This, according to Marx, appears to be an intermediary step on the way toward the abolition of *manus* through the secularisation of the state. *Manus* lost its religious and private character, and was instead replaced by the law of persons upheld by the state, which further undermined family-law and the authority of the *paterfamilias*.

Marx continues the discussion of the similarities between Roman marriage- and property-law. The similarities were particularly evident with marriages based on *coemptio*, where there was a symbolic sale of the bride to the groom. While the actual purchase of the woman no longer occurred, Marx notes that this form of marriage still took the form of a traditional acquisition of property based on the *mancipatio*.<sup>46</sup> This was not the same as other forms of property-transfer, however. Here, Marx describes the one-sided nature of this form of property-transfer. The wife had no rights to buy and sell: only her father or a guardian could make the decision on who she could marry. She would always be the object of the sale. Thus, due to the nature of the process, wives could be viewed as merely property of their husbands. This was even the case in divorce: Marx notes that in this form of marriage, divorce takes the form of a reverse property-transfer.

While this form of marriage could certainly be unfavourable to the woman, since it limited her power of choice and allowed for her to be treated as the property of the husband, Marx's notes also show another side to it. This form of marriage helped to pave the way for additional rights for women and freed them from guardianship, since *coemptio* was primarily based on commerce, which tended to provide legal rights to both parties involved. Moreover, as this form of marriage became more common due to the dissolution of traditional family-law, *coemptio* did not involve any kind of religious sanction.

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<sup>46</sup> *Mancipatio* was a traditional form of transferring property. With five witnesses present, the buyer places a copper-coin on a scale to denote the price being paid for the purchase of property.

Additionally, as women gained more power in relation to the *paterfamilias*, and as the traditional family began to further disintegrate, women used this as a way of gaining independence from their agnatic kin by marrying strictly for this purpose.

As the above example illustrates, changes in Roman practice and law did not always involve immediate and positive changes in status for Roman women. This was also true in terms of the development of an additional form of marriage that freed the woman from her husband's *manus*. *Usurpatio* was a form of free marriage where *manus* never came into effect, because Roman law would only recognise the institution of *manus* where a couple lived together uninterruptedly for one year. If the wife was able to spend three nights in succession away from her husband's house every year, then *manus* would not come into effect.

This had the potential of providing women with additional rights with regard to their husbands, but, as Marx's notes describe, this institution was not all that liberatory, at least at first. Instead of freeing her from all male domination, this weakening of the husband's power initially had the effect of increasing the power of her father over her, since she remained under his *potestas*. However, the situation began to change when the state began to regulate private life more and more. Over the centuries, as Rome became an empire, upper-class women gained a number of rights from the institution of free marriage. By the imperial period, beginning with the reign of Augustus in 31 BCE, the father's right to break up his daughter's marriage could be challenged. Moreover, the right to exert severe punishment, or to sell or kill his children, was taken away from the *paterfamilias* during the later imperial period in the third and fourth centuries CE. At least in this case, the conflict between the traditional family and the increasing power of the state benefited women.

### *Property and inheritance-rights*

In addition to women's increasing rights within the family, Marx also takes note of women's property and inheritance. Initially, it was only the *paterfamilias* that had the right to make a will. In the course of conflict between the patrician families and the state, where the state became predominant, this slowly began to change. The first exception to this occurred when the extension of the right to make a will was given to vestal virgins. This was possible because this small group of young women left their families without losing status and entered the service of the state. Each became a separate family of herself alone, and was not able to have children. Thus, her family could not expand. Since vestal virgins had no family, the state inherited their wealth

before the right of testament was given to them. Moreover, they were perhaps the most privileged women in Roman society, since at that time they were the only women who had the same legal capacity as non-*patres familias* men.

In his notes, Marx points to this first exception to the sacral law that involved inheritance-rights. This was, certainly, a small exception, since it was only granted to vestal virgins. These privileged women were very few in number and were granted this right at least in part because it did not directly interfere with family-law regarding inheritance. These women were the beginning and end of a new family-line, since they could not propagate, or inherit from, the family that they left.

Moreover, the state gained in this situation before the right to testate was granted to vestal virgins, since the woman could not make a will of her own and had no relatives to leave any of the wealth that she had acquired. Therefore, it was primarily in the interests of patricians who opposed the state to grant this right, rather than it originally being a concession to the state in opposition to sacral law. While this exception initially strengthened the hold of the traditional family-law, it also illustrated that at least some women could be fully *sui juris* [legally independent] and capable of rationally administering their own property. This would make it more difficult in the future to limit other women's property-rights based on a biologicistic argument of women's incapacity in these matters.

In at least one other case, Marx notes the changing position of women in Roman society. While the ability of women to inherit property was significantly restricted by the *Lex Voconia* (169 BCE), already in the Law of Twelve Tables of the fourth century BCE there was no legal restriction on women inheriting property. The man making the will had the right to give his property to whoever he wanted. In contrast, the *Lex Voconia* did not allow unmarried young women or the wives of the wealthiest citizens to be heirs.

Marx illustrates his interest in this particular law by underlining the text of the law that he takes from Lange, and also adding an exclamation-mark at the end. This deterioration of status in the wealthiest women's property-rights appeared to interest Marx a great deal. As in a number of other cases, Marx notes the changing position of women and other subordinate groups, often pointing out some of the contradictions that brought this about, as well as the further contradictions that would develop from these changes.

### *Guardianship*

In addition to Roman women gaining rights relative to their male family-members and in terms of inheritance, women's position changed as a result of an increasing realisation of their ability to rationally manage their own

property. This resulted in the gradual elimination of guardianship for women. Initially, under the Roman state, all women and minors were perceived as unable to fully manage their own property. They were, therefore, placed under the tutelage of the closest male agnate, who acted as a guardian if the *paterfamilias* died or was otherwise unable to manage the family-estate.

In his notes, Marx points to the different rationales for keeping women and children under guardianship. In the case of young boys, it was a temporary condition which ended once they reached puberty and became full citizens. Since they could then defend their property and their country, they would gain full control over their property and could acquire or dispose of it without the consent of a guardian. However, during the republican era, women had to have a guardian throughout their lives, because they were seen as lacking in reason and knowledge regarding the administration of property. Here, Marx's notes may illustrate at least some scepticism as to the reasoning for keeping women under guardianship. For example, he underlines certain phrases involving women's lack of control over property even after reaching adulthood, indicating some surprise at the notion that a woman would need to maintain counsel with a male in order to deal with her property after she had reached adulthood. Certainly, this was an idea that remained popular in Marx's own time, but he does not appear to have much sympathy for this position.

In addition to showing the differences in guardianship-laws for men and women, Marx also notes the changing status of women in this regard. As the traditional family began to weaken, it became more and more difficult to find an agnate who was willing to fulfil the role of guardian. Because of this, new legal procedures were created so that a non-relative could become a guardian of a woman following the death of her husband (or father for an unmarried woman). Normally, the father or husband would name a guardian (often a close relative) for his wife or daughter in case of his death, but the new law allowed him a different option. He could write a testament that would allow her to have a choice over the selection of a guardian and the power to dismiss that guardian, either a limited or an unlimited number of times. This was due, in large part, to the fact that relatives were often no longer available to perform these duties as they had in the past.

Therefore, mainly thanks to the disintegration of the traditional Roman family, women gained the right to choose their own guardians. This eventually led to the situation where more and more guardians for women became merely symbolic, since family-responsibility became less and less important. Additionally, since more-distant relatives often no longer lived together, family-guardians became less available than in previous times. Thus, in practice, women actually became their own guardians, since they had so much choice in choosing their guardians and dismissing them at will.



Moreover, it was not only widowed women that gained this right. Over time, a procedure developed so that women could be married solely for the purpose of separating themselves from their fathers' *manus* or guardians' tutelage. This was a complex procedure that involved first, the woman agreeing to *coemptio* with a man, not for the purpose of marriage but to be entrusted to a third party. This part of the process would remove agnatic guardianship from the woman, since the woman would first come into the *manus* of the 'husband' and later would come into the power [*mancipium*] of the buyer. This third party then technically became the guardian of the woman; however, the woman likely had significant control, since the terms were negotiated in advance. This, as Marx notes, could not be carried out without the consent of the guardian. Therefore, it can already be seen at this point that agnatic guardians often had little incentive to maintain their status as guardians, and that this was in most cases a legalistic means for a woman to formally acquire the rights which, in practice, she already had.

Marx's notes on Lange illustrate his interest in understanding the relationship of contradiction and conflict to historical change. Marx paid particular attention to how the conflict among patricians, plebeians and other groups contributed to the weakening of the patriarchal Roman family as the main unit of society, and the concomitant rise in the power of the state. This generally had positive effects on women's position in society, at least among the upper classes, since the men in the family and especially the *paterfamilias* lost some of their authority over all their relatives, including women. Women were therefore freed, at least to some extent, from some of the worst effects of patriarchal domination.

While the power of the Roman state over the family tended to have positive effects for upper-class women, there were still a number of problems. First, these reforms applied, for the most part, only to these women. Those in the lower classes continued to face oppression, both due to their class-position and as women. Second, the state was not itself an unambiguous force for improving the condition of women. It was the type of conflict that the state was engaged in that led to this outcome. In order for the imperial state to aggrandise its power against the patricians, it was necessary to undermine the family to at least some extent. Thus, lessening by degrees the domination of the patriarchal family over upper-class women was one means of carrying out this struggle.

## Conclusion

Marx's notes on Maine provide a vantage-point to discern his views on gender and the family near the end of his life, despite the fact that they are only

notes, rather than a more polished work. In a number of places, Marx's own voice becomes quite visible. This is especially true regarding his criticisms of Maine's patriarchal assumptions on the origin of the family and society. Here and in his other notes on ethnology, Marx appears to historicise the family, clarifying the ambiguity that a number of feminist scholars have pointed to regarding his position on women's 'nature'.

Instead of the family and the gendered division of labour being something that occurred relatively early on, Marx notes the contradictions and conflict that came about during the transformation from the relatively egalitarian clan to the patriarchal family of ancient-Indian and Irish societies. Moreover, this was not a simple transition. As Marx draws from both Maine and Lange's works, women did not appear to be merely passive victims of male oppression. Instead, in a number of cases, including Indian women's property-rights, there remained significant exceptions to men's predominance, something which Marx attributed to women's resistance to adverse changes to these earlier legal arrangements. In the case of the *Suttu* in particular, Marx argued that this led to the recasting of a previous religious tradition in order to expropriate property from widows without a male heir. This would not have been necessary had women readily accepted their declining status.

In certain places, Marx's notes on Maine bear a resemblance to some of his earlier discussions of human 'nature'. As was the case in the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *Capital*, Marx appears to view what is 'natural' from the vantage-point of historical development. While, in these other works, Marx only addresses this issue with regard to the more general relationship between humanity and nature, as mediated by labour, here Marx directly focuses on the issue of the family's historical nature. For Marx, the family cannot be viewed as a 'natural' entity: instead, it has a history of its own and develops in a similar way to other areas of society. Thus, there is not one form of the family, but many, based in part on the material conditions of the time. However, while Marx acknowledges multiple social arrangements regarding the family and in other areas of society, his theory can potentially avoid the strong relativism of poststructuralist thought as well, since the developments that occur in the family are not random, but instead are based on the movement in the general direction of greater freedom for individuals via the social group and necessity. Certainly, this is not to argue for a teleological view of progress. The activity of individuals – which can lead to either progress or regression – remains very important in understanding social relations and social change; however, to completely ignore or attribute very little explanatory power to macro-level social structures is equally dangerous. Throughout these notebooks, Marx appears to navigate very well the difficult terrain of combining

within his theoretical understanding both local and macro power-structures, albeit sometimes coming to problematic conclusions, without privileging or overlooking either.

Overall, Marx's notes on Lange appear to chart the development of the family and the state through contradiction and conflict in ancient-Roman society. Rather than adhering to the relatively static notions of the family of Lange and especially Maine, Marx appears to emphasise movement and change in these relationships. This is especially apparent, for example, in his discussion of the dissolution of the clan into and beyond the patriarchal family. Already at the height of the clan, Marx notes that there is the potential for development beyond the clan since, because of social custom, it was not self-sustaining. Because of its exogamous nature, women left and entered the clan through marriage, at least when it was not subject to mother-right. Because of the exchange of women between clans, and the fact that they would lose their status in the clan once they were married, to a certain extent, women were already less-valuable members of the group. This could, and likely did, lower the status of unmarried girls and women in these societies.

Once material conditions developed further and members of the clan were no longer controlled socially or economically by the patriarch – since they could, under certain conditions, engage in their own economic activities – they began to see the clan and its restrictions on property and in social matters as an obstacle to their own interests. The processes of women leaving the clan for marriage became a point of departure for those seeking to extricate themselves from the power of the clan. If women could leave the clan to be married or become a vestal virgin, then why could not men, who saw themselves as superior, also leave the clan, and unlike women (at least initially) go out on their own?

Thus, what began as a logical extension of rights in a particular system would, over time, become the means for breaking the bounds of this system as a whole. Using the example of women leaving the clan for marriage – the first socially-sanctioned means of leaving the power of the patriarch – men were able to transform clan-institutions and law to extricate themselves as well. This and a number of other practices including adoption, which were extensions of the clan-system, eventually led to a qualitative change where the clan-system itself dissolved, necessitating the state. These types of discussions are particularly important because they point to Marx's apparent understanding of class and gender as fundamentally related through parallel historical developments. Moreover, in these notebooks, Marx does not appear to privilege either class or gender over the other.

## Conclusion

As I have argued in the previous chapters, Marx's writings on gender and the family are significantly more substantial and more valuable than is usually acknowledged. Marx showed considerable insight into the gender-relations of his own time, pointing to the need for a total transformation of society that would necessarily involve new relations between men and women (even though there were some problematic elements as well). This was already quite evident in one of his early works, the 1844 *Manuscripts*, and was a theme that was to recur in his writings and political activity throughout his life.

It is true that Marx's writings on gender and the family are located sporadically throughout his work, and he does not provide a completely worked-out theory of gender-relations. However, this does not necessarily mean that Marx was not interested in understanding gender-relations, or that he was sexist. There certainly are some problematic areas in his writings on gender and the family, such as his ambivalent position regarding the changing moral status of women as they entered the workforce, here potentially illustrating a moderate Victorian viewpoint. Furthermore, Marx's discussions of a future socialist society remain quite abstract regarding the position of women.

Despite these and other difficulties, however, there are a number of positive elements in his work concerning gender and the family. First, in a number of his works such as *The Holy Family*, the suicide

essay/translation, the articles for *The New York Tribune*, and *Capital*, Marx discusses familial and other forms of oppression that women face because they are women. Second, Marx's position on a number of issues involving gender, including the family-wage, developed over time as he continued to study these issues and learn from women-workers fighting for their own rights. Third, and most importantly, while Marx was at times somewhat ambiguous on this point, he tended to view gender as a dynamic concept capable of further development. Thus, he pointed out in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, for example, that the position of women (and men) can and should change.

As discussed throughout this book, many feminist scholars have tended to have, at best, an ambiguous relationship with Marx and Marxism. One of the most important areas of contention involves the Marx/Engels relationship. While there has been a great deal of discussion of this relationship relating to a number of other issues, this has not been discussed to a significant extent with regard to their positions on gender and the family. Most often, Marx and Engels are viewed as having very similar positions on gender and the family, since Engels wrote a text primarily on gender and the family, *The Origin of the Family*, whereas Marx did not publish any similarly sustained discussion of gender.

Studies by Lukács, Carver and others have shown significant differences between Marx and Engels on dialectics as well as a number of other issues.<sup>1</sup> Building on these studies, I have explored their differences with regard to gender and the family as well. This is especially relevant to current debates, since a number of feminist scholars have criticised Marx and Engels for what they see as their economic determinism. However, Lukács and Carver both point to the degree of economic determinism as a significant difference between the two. Both view Engels as more monistic and scientific than Marx. Dunayevskaya is one of the few to separate Marx and Engels on gender, while likewise pointing to the more monistic and deterministic nature of Engels's position, in contrast to Marx's more nuanced dialectical understanding of gender-relations.<sup>2</sup>

While, in recent years, there has been little discussion of Marx's writings on gender and the family, in the 1970s and 1980s, these writings were subject to a great deal of debate. In a number of cases, elements of Marx's overall theory were merged with psychoanalytic or other forms of feminist theory by feminist scholars such as Hartsock and Hartmann,<sup>3</sup> because these scholars viewed

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1. See Lukács 1971 and Carver 1983.

2. Dunayevskaya 1991.

3. See Hartsock 1983 and Hartmann 1997.

Marx's theory as primarily gender-blind and in need of an additional theory to understand gender-relations as well. They retained Marx's historical materialism as a starting point for understanding production, however. Moreover, a number of Marxist feminists also made their own contributions in the late 1960s to 1980s, particularly in the area of political economy. For example, Margaret Benston, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, and Wally Secombe, have all tried to revalue housework.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Vogel has attempted to move beyond dual systems towards a unitary understanding of political economy and social reproduction.<sup>5</sup> Holmstrom has also shown that Marx can be used to understand the historical development of women's nature.<sup>6</sup>

However, the dual-systems theory which was a common form of socialist feminism in the 1970s and 1980s was viewed as a failed project by many in the 1990s and beyond. While the fall of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe probably had a negative effect on the popularity of socialist feminism, as Young had already argued,<sup>7</sup> dual-systems theory was inadequate since it was based on two very different theories of society – one involving the historical development of society, primarily because of social, economic and technological development, and the other based on a static psychological view of human nature. These two theories are very difficult to reconcile because of these vast differences. However, their critiques of what they viewed as Marx's determinism, gender-blind categories, and emphasis on production at the expense of reproduction, provided a starting point for my reexamination of Marx's work by means of close textual analysis – this in addition to the work of the Marxist feminists mentioned above.

Although Marx's work contained elements of Victorian ideology, there is much of interest on gender and the family scattered throughout his work. As early as 1844, in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx argued that women's position in society could be used as a measure of the development of society as a whole. While he was certainly not the first to make a statement such as this – Fourier is often attributed as the inspiration for this statement – for Marx, this was more than simply a call for men to change the position of women. Instead, as I have argued, Marx was making a dialectical argument that was directly related to his overall theory of society. In order for society to advance beyond its capitalist form, new social relations would have to be formed that did not rely solely upon a crude formulation of value. Human-beings would have to become able to see each other as valuable in

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4 See Benston 1969, Dalla Costa 1971; Federici 1975; and Secombe 1974.

5 Vogel 1983.

6 Holmstrom 1984.

7 Young 1980.

themselves, rather than as only valuable for what one individual can provide to another. Women would be especially significant in this regard, since they have tended to be a marginalised group within most, if not all, societies. Thus, men and women would have to reach a point of development where an individual is valued for who they are, rather than any abstract category of man, woman, etc.

Moreover, Marx appears to point in the direction of gender as a dynamic rather than static category. Certainly, Marx never directly made this claim: however, in the 1844 *Manuscripts* and in *The German Ideology*, he provided a strong critique of, and alternative to, traditional dualistic views of the nature/society dualism. Instead of nature and society existing as two distinct entities that interact with each other without fundamentally changing the essence of itself or the other, Marx argues that the two are dialectically related. As human-beings interact with nature through labour, both the individual and nature is changed. This occurs because human-beings exist as part of nature, and the labour-process provides the means for such a temporary unity. Since both nature and society are not static entities, Marx argued that there can be no transhistorical notion of what is 'natural'. Instead, a concept of 'natural' can only be relevant for specific historical circumstances.

While one should not draw too-close a parallel between the nature/culture dualism and the man/woman dualism – to do so could lead to a reification of these categories that we seek to transform – the sort of dialectical thinking that Marx evinces in regard to the nature/culture dualism is also evident in Marx and Engels's discussion of the gender-division of labour in *The German Ideology*. Here, they point to the division of labour in the early family as something that is not completely 'natural'. Instead, even in their brief discussion of the development of the family, they point out that this division of labour based on gender is only 'natural' for very undeveloped productive relations, where women's different biology would make it difficult for them to carry out certain physically-demanding tasks. The implication is that women's supposed inferiority in these societies is something that can change as society changes. Moreover, since a social element is involved, more is needed than technological development: women will have to work themselves to change their situation.

In at least two other places in his early writings, Marx discusses the position of women in capitalist society. In *The Holy Family*, Marx criticises Eugène Sue's moralistic commentary on the fictional Paris prostitute, Fleur de Marie, in *Les Mystères de Paris*. In this novel, Fleur de Marie is 'saved' from poverty and her life as a prostitute by a minor German prince. He entrusts her into the care of a religious woman and a priest who both teach her of the immorality of her behaviour. Eventually, she enters a nunnery and dies shortly thereafter.

Here, Marx criticises Sue for his uncritical acceptance of Catholic social teaching which focuses on an abstract form of morality that can never actually be achieved. Human-beings are not merely spiritual beings that can ignore their bodily needs. This was particularly relevant for someone like Fleur de Marie since, as Marx notes, she had no options available to her other than prostitution to provide herself with a livelihood. However, the priest showed Marie her moral degeneration and told her of the guilt that she should feel, despite the fact that she had no real choice in the matter. Thus, in this text, Marx shows a great deal of sympathy for the plight of working-class women. Moreover, he criticises the one-sidedness of Christianity, which seeks to raise the position of a pure form of mind against a pure form of the body.

While critics like Leeb have suggested that Marx was trying to elevate the body at the expense of the mind,<sup>8</sup> I have argued that it is more likely that Marx sought to unite mind and body into a dialectical whole. What Marx was most critical of was the one-sided focus of Christianity on a specific form of mind which degraded the body. While Fleur de Marie's situation was far from perfect in the beginning of the novel – she had very little control over her situation – the alternative life that she was given was far worse, since she was forced to atone for something for which she was not responsible, and could not have avoided.

Marx did not limit his critique of women's concrete situation under capitalism to the working class, however. In his 1846 essay/translation of Peuchet's work on suicide, Marx points to familial oppression within the upper classes.<sup>9</sup> Three of the four cases that Marx discusses involve female suicide due to familial oppression. In one case, a married woman committed suicide, at least in part because her jealous husband confined her to the home and was physically and sexually abusive. The second case involved an engaged woman who spent the night at her fiancé's house. After she returned home, her parents publicly humiliated her, and she later drowned herself. The final case involved the inability of a young woman to get an abortion after an affair with her aunt's husband.

In two of the cases, Marx shows great sympathy for the plight of these women by emphasising certain passages from Peuchet and surreptitiously adding his own remarks. Moreover, Marx points to the need for a total transformation of the bourgeois family, giving emphasis to the following passage from Peuchet: *'The revolution did not topple all tyrannies. The evil which one blames on arbitrary*

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8. Leeb 2007.

9. Marx 1999.



*forces exists in families, where it causes crises, analogous to those of revolutions'*.<sup>10</sup> In this way, Marx points to the family in its bourgeois form as oppressive, and something that must be significantly changed if a better society is to come about.

Marx and Engels returned to a critique of the bourgeois family in *The Communist Manifesto*. There, they argued that the family in its bourgeois form, based primarily on the management and transfer of property, was in a state of dissolution. The material conditions that had led to this form of the family were disappearing among the proletarians because they had no property to give to their children. They may have once been small subsistence-farmers, but this was no longer possible as land was expropriated by a number of means and they were forced into the cities and factories to make their livelihood. Without this ability to transmit property to their children after their death and to control their family's labour-power during their lifetime, the father's power was diminished significantly, leading in the direction of a different form of the family. Marx and Engels, at this point, did not discuss in any detail what would potentially come after the dissolution of this form of the family, however.

While it is a text devoted to the critique of political economy, there is a significant amount of material on gender and the family in *Capital*. Here, Marx returns to and concretises what he described as the abolition [*Aufhebung*] of the family in *The Communist Manifesto*. As machinery is introduced into the factories, requiring less physically-demanding labour, women and children become important categories of workers as well. Capital finds these workers particularly valuable, since they are from an oppressed group that can be compelled to work for less.

A number of other passages in *Capital* illustrate that Marx held a much more nuanced view of the position of women in the workforce than most feminists acknowledge. For example, as women entered the workforce, he writes, they potentially gained power in their private lives since they now contributed monetarily to the family's welfare, and were no longer under the direct control of their husbands or fathers for a large portion of the day. This had a significant effect on the family. Here, Marx shows both sides of this development. On the one hand, long hours and night-work tended to undermine traditional family-structures, as women were to a certain extent 'masculinised' by their work and were often unable to care for their children to the same extent that they had been able to do in the past. On the other hand, in a later passage, Marx notes that this seeming 'deterioration of character' led in the opposite

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10. Marx 1999, p. 51.

direction – towards ‘a higher form of the family’ in which women would be the true equals of men.<sup>11</sup>

While, at times, Marx’s discussion of the oppression of women-workers was somewhat limited, in *Capital*, Volume I and his earlier draft-material for *Capital* he offers a strong critique of the concept of productive labour under capitalism. Here, he makes a strong distinction between the concept of productive labour under capitalism and a concept of productive labour *as such*. The first is a one-sided understanding of productivity, where the only relevant factor is the production of surplus-value for the capitalist. However, the second concept of productive labour focuses on the production of use-values. Here, labour is valued as such if it produces something that can be used by individuals or society at large. This provides at least some ground for revaluing traditional women’s labour, even though Marx discussed this very little.

Marx’s political writings illustrate a certain evolution over time. Marx’s theoretical insights are often incorporated into his political activities. Some of his earliest political writings on the strikes in Preston, England in 1853–4 offer a relatively uncritical assessment of the workers’ demand for a family-wage for men. While Marx never directly repudiated this type of argument, his later positions appear to have changed, since he worked to incorporate women into the First International on an equal basis to men in the 1860s.

Moreover, Marx’s later work illustrates a further appreciation of working women’s demands during and after the Paris Commune. This is especially evident in the 1880 ‘Programme of the Parti Ouvrier’, co-written by Marx, Lafargue, and Guesde. The preamble, written solely by Marx, states ‘That the emancipation of the productive class is that of all human beings without distinction of sex or race’.<sup>12</sup> This was an especially strong statement in France, where the rather sexist Proudhonist tradition predominated among socialists.

Also in his writings for the *New York Tribune* in 1858, Marx returned to his discussion of the position of upper-class women in capitalist society. In two articles for the *Tribune*, Marx recounts the confinement of an aristocratic woman to an asylum in order to silence her and prevent her from further embarrassing her politically-influential husband. Here, Marx criticises all involved in Lady Bulwer-Lytton’s confinement, arguing that she was far from insane. While Marx does not discuss the ways in which women in particular are often falsely confined as a means of control, he does note the ease with

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11 Marx 1976, p. 621.

12 Marx 1992, p. 376.

which people can be confined regardless of their actual psychological state, if those requesting the confinement are wealthy and powerful enough to induce medical professionals to give their signatures. Additionally, he shows a great deal of sympathy for Lady Bulwer-Lytton, who was effectively silenced due to an agreement where she was only able to regain her freedom so long as she agreed to never discuss the incident again.

I have argued that his last years, 1879–83, were one of the most theoretically interesting periods of Marx's life, especially concerning gender and the family. In his research-notebooks, as well as his letters and published writings, he began to articulate a less deterministic model of social development, in which less-developed societies could be the first to carry out revolutions so long as they were followed by revolutions in more advanced states. But more importantly for this study, Marx incorporated into his theory new historical subjects. It was not just the working class as an abstract entity that was capable of revolution. Instead, peasants and especially women became important forces for change within Marx's theory. These notebooks give some indications, albeit in a fragmentary way, of how Marx saw women as subjects in the historical process.

Marx's notes on Morgan are particularly important, since they provide a direct comparison with Engels's *Origin of the Family*, which Engels claimed to be a relatively close representation of Marx's reading of Morgan's *Ancient Society*. In contrast, I have argued that there are significant differences. The most important of these are Marx's less deterministic understanding of societal development and his more dialectical grasp of contradiction within the relatively egalitarian clan.

While Engels tended to focus almost solely and one-sidedly on economic and technological change as factors in societal development, Marx took a more dialectical approach, where social organisation is not only a subjective factor, but in the right situation can become an objective one as well. This is particularly relevant to understanding their differences on gender-oppression. Here, Engels argued that the development of agricultural technology, private property and the subsequent changes in the clan from mother-right to father-right led to the 'world-historic defeat of the female sex', where women would remain in a condition of subjugation until the destruction of private property. In contrast, Marx not only noted the subordinate position of women, but also pointed to the potential for change, even under private property, with his discussion of the Greek goddesses. Even though ancient-Greek society was quite oppressive to women, confining them to their own section of the home, Marx argued that the Greek goddesses potentially provided an alternative model for women. Marx also showed in these notes the progress of upper-class

Roman women, in contrast to their Greek counterparts. Moreover, Marx tended to take a more nuanced and dialectical approach to the development of contradictions in these early egalitarian societies. As discussed in Chapter Five, Engels tended to view the relatively egalitarian communal societies as lacking significant contradictions, especially with regard to gender-relations. Marx, however, pointed to limitations in women's rights in the communally-based Iroquois society.

While Engels's *Origin of the Family* only discussed Marx's notes on Morgan's *Ancient Society*, Marx's notebooks on ethnology span a number of other sources. His notes on Henry Sumner Maine's *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* and Ludwig Lange's *Römische Alterthümer*, ('Ancient Rome') offer significant discussions of gender and the family in precapitalist societies as well, particularly Ireland, India and Rome. In his notes on both authors, Marx appears to have appropriated much of Morgan's theory of the development of the clan. While Marx's notes on Maine tend to be much more critical than those on Lange, in both cases Marx criticises their uncritical acceptance of the patriarchal family as the first form.

This is particularly important since it tends to point in the direction of a historical understanding of the family. In these, as well as the Morgan notes, Marx charts the contradictions present in each form of the family and how these contradictions sharpen, leading to significant changes in the structure of the family. Here, Marx appears to view the family as subject to a similar dialectic as that of other areas of society.

### **Evaluating Marx's work on gender and the family for today**

Historically, Marxism's relationship with feminism has been tenuous at best, often due to the lack of discussion of gender and traditional women's issues by many Marxists. Moreover, even where gender and the family have been addressed by Marxists, these studies have tended to follow Engels's economic determinism. However, as I have argued, Marx's work on gender and the family displays significant differences from this type of determinism. Important questions remain regarding the possible value of Marx's views on gender and the family: What, if anything, does Marx have to offer to contemporary feminist debates? Is there the possibility of a Marxist feminism that does not lapse into economic determinism or privilege class over gender in analysing contemporary capitalist society?

This work can only offer some very preliminary answers to these questions. However, I have argued that there are a number of potential starting points for a less deterministic and less gender-blind form of Marxism.

Certainly, Marx's account of gender and the family occasionally evinced signs of Victorian morality; however, as I have argued, this is not necessarily a fatal flaw in his work. There are a number of areas in which Marx's theory of society provides the possibility of incorporating feminist insights into Marxism to establish a unitary theory of gender- and class-oppression, which does not fundamentally privilege either.

One of the most important aspects of Marx's work for understanding gender and the family is Marx's dialectical method. As I have argued, in most cases, Marx's categories came from a dialectical analysis of the empirical world. These categories are dynamic and are based on social relationships rather than static ahistorical formulations. Thus, these categories could change as society changes.

This could potentially be valuable to feminism. Marx never directly addressed gendered dualisms and categories, but, as I have argued, he leaves some room in his theory for change within these categories. This is especially true in regard to two dualisms: the nature/culture dualism and the production/reproduction dualism. In both cases, Marx points to the historical and transitory nature of these formulations. Nature and culture are not absolute opposites: they are, instead, moments of the whole. Labour, as a necessary activity for survival, mediates humanity's relationship with nature in very specific ways, based on the particular mode of production in question. Moreover, in terms of the production-and-reproduction dualism, Marx is normally careful to note that both are necessary to humanity, but that these will take different forms based upon the technological and social development of the society in question.

In both cases, Marx points to two different aspects of these categories – the historically-specific elements and the more abstract characteristics that exist in every society. Thus, in terms of understanding women's relationship to these dualisms, it would appear that a logical formulation within Marx's thought would be to point out that biology is certainly relevant. However, biology cannot be viewed as such and outside of the social relations of a particular society. This can potentially help to avoid the biologicistic and deterministic arguments of some radical and socialist feminists who essentialise 'women's nature', while at the same time avoiding relativism since, in Marx's view, the world is not completely socially constructed. Rather, biology and nature are important variables when viewed within a socially-mediated framework.

This is important for another reason as well. While Marx's theory remains underdeveloped in terms of providing an account that includes gender as important to understanding capitalism, his categories, nonetheless, lead in the direction of a systematic critique of patriarchy as it manifests itself in

capitalism since he is able to separate out the historically-specific elements of patriarchy from a more general form of women's oppression, as it has existed throughout much of human history. In this sense, his categories provide resources for feminist theory, or at least areas for new dialogue, at a time when Marx's critique of capital is coming to the fore once again.

In addition to his focus on social mediation and his emphasis on understanding particular social systems, I have argued that Marx was not a strong economic determinist. Certainly, economic factors play a very significant role, because they condition other social behaviour; however, Marx was often careful to note the reciprocal, dialectical relation between economic and social factors. As was the case with nature and culture as well as production and reproduction, economic activity and social activity are dialectical moments of the whole in a particular mode of production. In the last analysis, the two cannot be separated out completely, as Marx illustrated in his 'suicide' essay and *New York Tribune* articles, where he points to the unique ways in which economics and the specifically capitalist form of patriarchy interact to oppress women. Thus, in these and his other writings, Marx, at least tentatively, began to discuss the interdependent relationship between class and gender without fundamentally privileging either in his analysis.

This book has explored and developed a critique of Marx's major and minor writings in order to elucidate systematically his theorisation of gender and the family. While not all aspects of Marx's writings on gender and the family are relevant today, and some carry the limitations of nineteenth-century thought, these texts offer important insights on gender and political thought. Although Marx did not write a great deal on gender, and did not develop a systematic theory of gender and the family, it was, for him, an essential category for understanding the division of labour, production, and society in general. I have argued that Marx's discussion of gender and the family extended far beyond merely including women as factory-workers. Marx noted the persistence of oppression in the bourgeois family and the need to work out a new form of the family. Additionally, Marx became more and more supportive of women's demands for equality in the workplace, in unions, and in the International, as he studied capitalism and witnessed the role of women in such important events as the Paris Commune of 1871. Despite their unpolished and fragmentary character, Marx's notes on ethnology are particularly significant, since Marx points quite directly to the historical character of the family through his selections of Morgan, Maine and Lange. Moreover, Marx's use of dialectics is an important methodological contribution to feminism and social research in general, since he seemed to view gender as subject to change and development, rather than as a static concept.

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